DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 351 553 CE 062 418

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TITLE "Their Chances? Slim and None." An Ethnographic Account of the Experiences of Low-Income People of Color in a Vocational Program and at Work.
INSTITUTION National Center for Research in Vocational Education, Berkeley, CA.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Vocational and Adult Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Nov 92
CONTRACT V051A80004-90A
NOTE 112p.
AVAILABLE FROM NCRVE Materials Distribution Service, Horrabin Hall 46, Western Illinois University, Macomb, IL 61455 (order no. MDS-155: $5).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Banking; *Basic Skills; Blacks; Citizenship Education; Community Colleges; *Critical Thinking; Economically Disadvantaged; Educational Change; Educational Experience; Educational Research; Education Work Relationship; Employment Potential; Ethnography; Females; *Finance Occupations; Followup Studies; Job Placement; *Job Training; Labor Turnover; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; Role of Education; Two Year Colleges; *Vocational Education; *Vocational Followup; Work Experience
IDENTIFIERS African Americans; Workplace Literacy

ABSTRACT

This paper describes ethnographic research in a community college banking and finance program in the context of the opposing positions of the need for basic skills and preparation for jobs and the need for critical skills and preparation for citizenship in a democracy. After these positions are reviewed, research is described on students in the program, presenting the perspectives of the teacher, employer, and students. The paper argues that, as far as the students in this study are concerned (poor people of color in desperate need of jobs), proponents of basic skills miss the mark, given that such capabilities did not have much to do with whether workers were able to attain, perform, or keep their jobs. Findings are presented that seem to discredit the skills argument. The paper goes on to explain what the real problem might be. It accounts for how and why African-American women from the program were encouraged and helped to take low-level jobs that most of them would quickly lose, by investigating how students, teachers, and employers in this particular context together constructed a career path and work identity for students. The paper illustrates the ongoing struggle between democratizing and reproductive forces and shows reproductive forces winning out. Having suggested that the problem is not basic skills, the paper reexamines arguments for the centrality of critical skills in vocational education. Suggestions are made for reorganization and reform in both the community college vocational program and the workplace. (80 references) (YLB)

ED351553

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National Center for Research in
Vocational Education

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An Ethnographic Account of the Experiences of Low-Income People of Color in a Vocational Program and at Work

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Supported by
The Office of Vocational and Adult Education,
U.S. Department of Education

November, 1992

MDS-155

CE 062 418

FUNDING INFORMATION

Project Title:	National Center for Research in Vocational Education
Grant Number:	V051A80004-90A
Act under which Funds Administered:	Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act P.L. 98-524
Source of Grant:	Office of Vocational and Adult Education U.S. Department of Education Washington, DC 20202
Grantee:	The Regents of the University of California National Center for Research in Vocational Education 1995 University Avenue, Suite 375 Berkeley, CA 94704
Director:	Charles S. Benson
Percent of Total Grant Financed by Federal Money:	100%
Dollar Amount of Federal Funds for Grant:	$5,675,000
Disclaimer:	This publication was prepared pursuant to a grant with the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education. Grantees undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgement in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official U.S. Department of Education position or policy.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by a grant from the National Center for Research in Vocational Education to Glynda Hull and Jenny Cook-Gumperz. Special thanks are due Kay Losey Fraser, Susan Thompson, and Marisa Castellano for their able help as research assistants throughout the project and to Renee Anspach, Margaret Easter, Norton Grubb, Nelly Stromquist, Ed Warshauer, and the anonymous reviewers selected by NCRVE for their helpful comments on earlier drafts.

PREFACE

It is claimed that this is an information age in which ever more sophisticated literacy skills become essential for people to manage not only new technologies but their own everyday lives. Against the backdrop of rapid technological change, the current fear is that too many people—displaced workers, high school dropouts, many minorities, and non-native speakers—are hindered by insufficient literacy skills. The research reported here, conducted under the sponsorship of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, focused on an "at-risk" segment of the population—the noncollege-educated youth referred to as the "forgotten half" by the Grant Commission (1988), and other re-entry and minority adults. It sought to understand the relationship between the literacy skills these adults are increasingly expected to have or to acquire and vocational education and work.

The project, called "Preparing a Literate Workforce," was conducted jointly by Glynda Hull and Jenny Cook-Gumperz and was designed to address questions such as

- What roles do literacy skills play in the work world, and how essential are they to success in a job?
- How applicable is college-based learning to work contexts?
- How does learning on the job differ from learning in a school setting?
- What kinds of literacy curricula are best suited for "at-risk" adults in vocational programs?

To address these questions, we explored in ethnographic detail two possible ways for adults to re-enter education and to prepare for transition back into the workforce with additional skills and experience. In a community college, one pathway is through basic skills to certification programs. It can be short-term, leading to a college in-house certificate, or it can involve a longer program of study, leading to an externally recognized degree certificate or license. We selected as a short-term case study a banking and finance vocational program and as a long-term example, a program to train licensed vocational nurses. Banking and Finance is an open-entry, open-exit program leading to a certificate and in most cases immediate job placement. Nursing, however,

requires a one-semester, prenursing course and three semesters of combined classroom work and clinical training leading to a state board examination to grant a license. Although students often have difficulty with the literacy requirements of the programs and/or the workplace, neither program is set up to deal with basic skills, which traditionally have not been the province of vocational training. One of the purposes of our project, then, is to call attention to ways in which there can be a dialogue between vocational educators and the providers of training in basic skills and academic literacies—a dialogue that would ease the transition that students must make between basic skills programs, vocational programs, and employment or further academic training.

The following report, written by Glynda Hull with assistance from Kay Losey Fraser, focuses on the vocational program in banking and finance.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper describes ethnographic research in a community college Banking and Finance program. My colleagues and I studied this program for over three years, following students from the time they entered the program through the time they spent working at banks and at other jobs and beyond. Most students were African-American women. Some of them were older and returning to school in hopes of improving their skills and getting better jobs; others were younger single mothers who wanted to get off public assistance and find a better way to support their families. Virtually all students, men and women, were people of color; they were poor, and they were in desperate need of jobs.

I situate this report in the current furor over what employers want and what America needs in its workforce. Some believe America's workers are seriously deficient, possessing neither "basic" skills in reading, writing, and math, nor those "advanced" skills thought to be required in reorganized and technologically sophisticated workplaces—skills like "problem-solving" and "judgment" and what Zuboff (1988) calls "intellective" as opposed to "sentient" capabilities. On the heels of such concern is increasing pressure on educators, including vocational teachers and providers of basic skills and remedial training, to create relevant and accountable programs and curricula. Contrasting this position are the views of critical and social theorists who find the link that many assume between a poor economy and deficient workers to be weak, unconvincing, and harmful. According to this viewpoint, workers need to cultivate not just basic skills or job-related training, but what we might call "critical" skills—the ability to reflect on, assess, and ultimately alter society and one's place in it.

After reviewing these positions, I describe our research on students in the vocational program in Banking and Finance, presenting in turn the perspectives of the teacher, the employer, and the students. I then argue that, as far as the students in this study are concerned, proponents of basic skills surely miss the mark, given that such capabilities did not have much to do with whether workers were able to attain, perform, or keep their jobs. Indeed, in my view, the whole fabric of the skills argument, particularly the unquestioned connection between the acquisition and possession of basic skills and the opportunity to display and use them for advancement, is shot full of holes.

I go on to explain what I think the real problem, the larger issues, might be. I try to account for how and why African-American women from the Banking and Finance program were encouraged and helped to take low-level jobs in local banks that most would quickly lose. In so doing, I did not subscribe to deterministic structural theories of reproduction such as those of Bowles and Gintis (1974), for as many people have now pointed out (e.g., Willis, 1977), such theories leave no space for individual agency or the investigation of the process of reproduction. On the other hand, I did not assume that the students in my study would manifest resistance in just the same way as Willis's students. Rather, I attempted to investigate how students, teachers, and employers in this particular context together constructed a career path and a work identity for students in the program, paying attention to the interaction of race, class, and gender in this process. As Carnoy and Levin (1985) have usefully argued, both democratizing and reproductive forces are always present in our society. This paper illustrates the ongoing struggle between these forces, and shows, in this instance, reproductive forces winning out. "Their chances? Slim and none," said the teacher in the vocational program about the prospects of most young people in East Oakland, California. The same turned out to be true, unfortunately, for most of the students in my study.

Having suggested that the problem is not basic skills pure and simple, I examine again arguments for the centrality of critical skills in education, in this case vocational education. Although I am sometimes dissatisfied with the level of argument exemplified in critical theory, which can maintain an Olympian distance from the everyday concerns of the people whose interests it hopes to serve, I do see the need for an approach to literacy and education which foregrounds the development of critical capabilities. However, I believe that we must also take into account that people have to be able to survive, to satisfy fundamental human needs, even to get ahead and prosper. Critical skills need to offer and to be offered as more than an irrelevant luxury when people are desperate for jobs. We need as well to find ways to honor adult students' aspirations and their own definitions of success, understanding that their perspectives may differ, indeed, have every right to differ, from our own. I end the report with a summary and some implications for vocational education and work.

THE CRISIS IN THE WORKPLACE: POLAR PERSPECTIVES

The most recent of several educational crises has to do not with school children, but with American workers. We are told by a variety of commission reports, surveys of employers, and popular articles that increasingly American workers are illiterate and poorly skilled, that literacy demands in the workplace are growing with the advent of new technologies and new ways of organizing work, and that business and industry should make haste to provide the training that people do not get in school and college—or else be prepared to suffer. Here is a sampling of these recent concerns:[1]

> More and more, American employers will no longer enjoy the luxury of selecting from a field of workers with strong basic skills. The demand for labor will create opportunities for those who are less skilled; the disadvantaged will move up the labor queue and be hired in spite of obvious skill deficiencies (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1988).
>
> Already the skills deficit has cost businesses and taxpayers $20 billion in lost wages, profits and productivity. For the first time in American history, employers face a proficiency gap in the work force so great that it threatens the well-being of hundreds of U.S. companies. (Gorman, 1988)
>
> Qualifications for today's middle and low-wage jobs are rising even more rapidly than in the past. In 1965, a car mechanic needed to understand 5,000 pages of service manuals to fix any automobile on the road; today, he must be able to decipher 465,000 pages of technical text, the equivalent of 250 big-city telephone books (Whitman, Shapiro, Taylor, Saltzman, & Auster, 1989).

On the basis of such concerns, there has sprung up a new industry of training services and literacy programs designed specifically for the workplace. There are general guides to help employers assess the skills of workers and design training programs—for example, *Upgrading Basic Skills for the Workplace* (1989); *The Bottom Line: Basic Skills in the Workplace*, 1988; and *Literacy at Work: The Workbook for Program Developers* (Philippi, 1991). And there are even guides for particular industries such as *Strategic Skills Builders for Banking* (Mikulecky & Philippi, 1990) and *The American*

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[1]The popular discourse on workplace literacy is reviewed in detail by Hull (1991). The view that unskilled minorities and women will increasingly dominate the workforce while future jobs will require more highly skilled workers is largely based on a widely disseminated report prepared by the Hudson Institute for the Department of Labor, *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century* (Johnston & Packer, 1987). For a counter argument, see Mishel and Teixeira's (1991) *The Myth of the Coming Labor Shortage*. For plans to shape schooling to fit changes thought to be occurring in workplaces, see the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) (1992).

Bankers Association's Survey on Basic Skills in Banking (American Bankers Association, 1989), a series of workbooks inspired by a survey of bank managers concerning the extent of the basic skills problem among their employees. Such guides often recommend basing literacy and skills training on texts or activities from work. The workbooks on banking, for example, provide work-at-your-own-pace lessons on counting cash at home and in the bank, checking catalog order forms, reading bank tickets, finding errors on receipts, and correcting balance sheets.

The popular rhetoric—the positions regularly put forth as fact and the assumptions behind many of the commercially prepared curriculum materials as well as actual workplace literacy programs—is that workers lack skills, that work now requires and will continue to require more and different skills, and that businesses are suffering at the hands of deficient workers, so we had better train those workers. These beliefs do not exist in isolation, of course, but can be seen as part of a dominant discourse on schooling, the now familiar fears that American schools are failing, that American children are not doing as well in the classroom as their counterparts in other industrialized countries, and that, consequently, since our businesses and industries cannot compete globally, we are at the mercy of the Japanese. In this panic-laden atmosphere, educators are urged to get tough and to get back to basics, and these same admonitions are applied to literacy providers and trainers. There is also the frankly expressed desire to connect schooling and work as closely as possible, making sure that whatever is learned in the classroom transfers to the job. Although similar concerns are almost always operative for some students, teachers, and schools, America's current economic recession and worries about competition make these viewpoints particularly potent and widespread.

If this is the dominant rhetoric, there is also a counter-rhetoric. A few people have begun to question the recent, apocalyptic views of America's illiterate workers. For example, Sarmiento (1991; Sarmiento & Kay, 1990) has argued that the real problem in workplaces is not literacy, but outmoded forms of work organization in the mold of Frederick Taylor. Drawing on his ethnographic research in a wire and cable factory and also an electronics firm, Darrah (1990, 1992) has demonstrated that whatever skills workers have or lack, incentives and disincentives in the workplace influence whether workers will employ those skills. In a review of workplace literacy issues, I have argued that the popular rhetoric on literacy and work underestimates human potential and offers literacy as a curative for problems literacy cannot solve (Hull, 1991).

The most developed counter-rhetoric to current views on literacy and work comes, however, not from research on present day workplaces—these perspectives are still relatively rare in print[2]—but from critical educational theorists. Drawing on the work of people like John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Antonio Gramsci, these writers question the wisdom of linking education to marketplace imperatives, looking instead for a moral and civic rationale for schooling. For example, Giroux and McLaren (1989) want an education which "aims at developing critical citizens and reconstructing community life by extending the principles of social justice to all spheres of economic, political, and cultural life" (p. xxii). And they speak of "learning for empowerment" (p. xxiii), whereby education draws upon the diversity of resources that students bring to school, rather than promoting an uncritical adoption of "values consistent with industrial discipline and social conformity" (p. xvii). They especially decry "remedial" education for its implication that students are placed in particular tracks because of their own shortcomings or virtues.

Ira Shor (1989), a critical theorist and teacher (see his *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, 1980, and *Culture Wars: School and Society in the Conservative Restoration 1969-1984*, 1986), sees a necessity to "de-vocationalize" students, to provide an alternative to narrow skills training for immediate job placement. He wants an education that is "participatory," "critical," "situated," "dialogic," "desocializing," "democratic," "interdisciplinary," and "activist" in orientation. He illustrates a problem-posing, critical approach to education for work as well. For example, he recommends setting up a gallery exhibit about students' communities and the occupations for which they are training. He argues that such exhibits and the questions that would surround them allow education to begin with students' backgrounds and histories and would include global thinking about conditions of work. Shor also recommends having students interview workers, organize

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[2]Despite the many and frequent claims concerning the skills, including the literacies, required in reorganized, technologically sophisticated workplaces, as well as what skills workers lack, relatively little is known about the actual skill demands of these workplaces or the kinds of training new jobs might require. There have been studies of the "reading difficulty level" of job-related materials through the application of readability formulas (cf. Diehl & Mikulecky, 1980; Duffy, 1985; Mikulecky, 1982; Rush, Moe, & Storlie, 1986), as well as attempts to differentiate reading at school from reading at work (cf. Diehl & Mikulecky, 1980; Sticht, 1979; Sticht, Armstrong, Hickey, & Caylor, 1987; Sticht & Hickey, 1987). And there have been a handful of projects which examined literacy at work within larger ethnographic studies of knowledge acquisition in real-world settings (e.g., Jacob, 1986; Martin & Scribner, 1988; Scribner, 1985, 1987; Scribner & Sachs, 1991). However, for the most part, complaints about worker "illiteracy" arise, as Darrah (1990, 1992) points out, not from detailed observations of work, but from surveys and anecdotal reports (e.g., American Bankers Association, 1989; cf. Baba, 1991).

the material they collect, and present it for critical discussion. All this would take place in addition to technical job training.

Basic skills—critical skills. Preparation for jobs—preparation for citizenship in a democracy. I see this opposition as one illustration of what Carnoy and Levin (1985; Carnoy, 1989) have called the "reproductive" and "democratizing" forces in American education. On the one hand, there are "attempts by the dominant class to impose its concept of the world on the mass of youth in school," and on the other, "attempts by subordinate groups to shape schools and school expansion to contribute to the development of their cultures in the context of an American capitalist development that serves them and not just the business class" (Carnoy, 1989, p. 3). One of these opposing forces, say Carnoy and Levin, is in ascendancy at any given historical period. The sixties are the most recent example of the ascendancy of democratizing forces, while the present decade and the legacy of Reagan are most certainly instances of the successful imposition of dominant-group or reproductive ideology. But Carnoy and Levin also argue that the opposing forces are always simultaneously present, always both at work, each being able potentially to modify the other. Thus, there is always available an "exploitable political space for those that are willing to engage in the struggle for change" (Carnoy, 1989, p. 6), even change in education at the current moment—particularly, argues Carnoy, if educators align themselves with a potent social movement.

Carnoy and Levin's theory is useful because it provides a historical context for viewing the skills controversy currently raging around the American workforce. It is possible, then, to sort the players in this controversy into one large and one small pile according to whether they seem to favor reproductive or democratizing forces, and perhaps to take some comfort as well, whatever side you favor, in the belief that the potential exists for change. As an educator and researcher, and from a personal as well as professional point of view, I have much more sympathy for the philosophy and goals of the critical theorists of the world than I do for boosters of basic and high tech skills for an illiterate workforce. However, in the research I am reporting in this paper, I have tried to follow a different path. Rather than taking sides and digging in, I have tried to understand how those people who are talked about and referred to in commission reports and theoretical treatises—that is, students and workers—actually experience training programs and their jobs. And I have attempted to let those understandings inform, guide, and temper my evaluation of the skills controversy. Putting aside for the moment Carnoy and Levin's

long-range historical forecast for change—I will return to their ideas later, as well as to the related positions of social theorists—I want to set my sights on the present, taking very seriously the aspirations and experiences of a group of African-American women and other minority students who enrolled in a vocational training program in Banking and Finance because, as many of them told me, "You know Mr. Parker? Well, he'll get you a job."

A STUDY OF WOMEN, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, AND WORK

My colleagues and I have attempted to study how people experience vocational education programs and what those programs, and the jobs that people get as a result of vocational training, have to do with literacy and current claims that American workers are illiterate. Although a great deal of research attention is focused on vocational education these days, much of the research that is done is quantitative and "top-down," judging, for example, the outcomes of programs as measured by dropout rates and job placement (Klaus, 1990). We chose a different path, focusing on people—rather than programs—and programs as they are experienced by people.

Employing an ethnographic approach, we used initial observational time, as well as previous research, to identify critical issues and key events, and then used multiple methods to focus on and study these issues and events. After relating ethnographic observations to the issues and key events we had previously identified, we returned to the field to verify findings. Built into the fieldwork, then, was a self-correcting cycle; whereby we collected data, juxtaposed it to our initial observations and theories, and returned to the field to test our emerging findings and collect further data.

As one data collection method, I gathered educational life histories from participants in the program—interviewing and audiotaping sessions about students' previous educational and work histories, their views about their future work in banks, and also their beliefs about the importance of literacy in work. These interviews usually lasted an hour or an hour and a half, and most of them were conducted at the vocational program with just the researcher and one student present, although I sometimes interviewed two people together. I also conducted follow-up interviews with most participants after they had gotten (and, in most cases, lost) jobs in banks. Additionally, in a few cases, I interviewed former graduates of the program, people who are presently working in banks. Some of

these interviews were conducted again at the vocational program, but others took place in participants' homes. (Since the completion of this report, I have continued to stay in contact with the participants in the study and to interview them; I will report on this more longitudinal work at a later time.)

Complementing these interviews with students were extensive interviews with the teacher of the Banking and Finance program. Mr. Parker (all names are pseudonyms) was quite supportive of my research, spending many hours in interviews, representing me as a "good guy" to the students in his program, making it possible for me to interview on site and to do videotaping of training. He was also instrumental in helping me gain access to banks and bank personnel. He seemed to take my research as an opportunity to be reflective about his work as a former bank vice-president and now a vocational education teacher. Feeling rather unsupported in his community college, he viewed my interest in his program as an affirmation of his teaching. He said I was "putting words to his music," and he welcomed me and other members of our research group with unusual good humor and eagerness.

Additional data on the vocational program includes field notes and videotapes of classroom instruction. I observed lectures and discussions and, on rare occasions, was called upon to supply part of that instruction, teaching students what I knew about interviews, for example, or about writing résumés. I also observed laboratory sessions on machine calculation and simulated banktelling, and I videotaped in each of these settings.

My other interest was, of course, the employer's angle. Through the good will of Mr. Parker, I was able to interview and videotape the personnel manager of Bank of the Pacific, the primary employer of students from the Banking and Finance program. Mrs. Lavelle comes to the program regularly to test students and interview them for jobs as "proof-operators" (explained later), and I was able to videotape a number of these interview sessions. Along with several representatives from other local banks, Mrs. Lavelle sits on an advisory board to the vocational program. I was able to attend these advisory meetings and to interview some of the other personnel managers of local banks. When several students in the cohort I was studying failed the proof-operation test, I served as a tutor, helping students to analyze what was required by the test and to practice it. These sessions were audiotaped. I, too, took several screening tests for jobs as a proof-operator (which I,

too, repeatedly failed) and was interviewed for a part-time job as a proof-operator in a different city.

Finally, I was able to visit the proof-operation center which serves many of the multiple branches of Bank of the Pacific and employs many of the graduates of Mr. Parker's program. There I interviewed the manager on two occasions, got tours of the center, and collected some of the documents proof-operators use in their work. My biggest regret about the research reported in this paper is that I did not get to spend as much time as I wanted in this center or in branch banks, nor was I allowed to videotape in these workplaces (cf. Darrah, 1990, who critiques the notion of a "grand tour"). Despite the intercession of Mr. Parker and my own multiple letters and requests, bank managers are wary for security reasons of letting people inside, particularly with cameras, to study how work gets done. (In a more recent project, my colleague Katherine Schultz and I were finally able to gain entry to a bank's data center and to use ethnographic methods to study the organization of work and the role of literacy in the performance of work [Hull & Schultz, in preparation].)

The Program: "You know Mr. Parker? Well, he'll get you a job."

The Banking and Finance program is part of Gateway College, an urban community college in the Bay Area of Northern California which serves mostly a minority population—African Americans (33%), Asian Americans (21%), Hispanics (9%), Filipinos (4%), and Native Americans (1%). In Banking and Finance, there are proportionately more African-American students, around sixty percent from 1988 to 1991; thirty percent Asian students; and one or two percent Caucasian. The program is "open entry/open exit," which means that a student can enter the program at any time and leave at any time—presumably for a job in a bank. There is not, then, a definite time requirement associated with the program, although a new session in Banking and Finance starts with each academic semester and, often, with summer school as well. For example, a student might come to the program, stay three weeks, and be sent to a job in a local bank. As Mr. Parker is fond of saying, many students already know most of what they need to know in order to get entry-level work in banks; at this point, they just require some polishing, some confidence-building. A few students cycle out of Banking and Finance when they and their instructor realize they cannot read well enough to pass the proof-operation tests recently

instituted by banks as part of the application process. However, most students do stay in the program at least six or eight weeks before they are sent on jobs, and some stay until the end of the academic semester. A few repeat the sequence consecutively, or they attend the program for a while, go off for other training or work, then cycle back through. It is important to note that this is a short-term vocational program, and that it is not characteristic of efforts in vocational education to provide long-term instruction and to link that instruction to "academic" preparation.

Most of the students in the program—about ninety-five percent—are women. Some of the African-American women are older, have not worked or been in school for a while, and are hoping now to hone their skills and re-enter the workforce. Others are younger, nineteen and twenty or just out of high school, and often single parents of very young children. These women, too, are eager for a leg-up in the work world; they want to get off assistance and make a better life for their children. Most of the other students are young Asian women—Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipino—many of whom still live at home with their parents. Some of these students are looking for part-time work to support themselves while they go to school or to supplement one job they are already working. There is also sometimes a sprinkling of Latinas, African-American men, and Asian men in the class.

Most students hear about Banking and Finance by word of mouth: "My girlfriend's brother and her cousin were in this program and they told me about it." Others say they were flipping through the college catalogue and saw the program description: "My finger got stuck on the page," as one student put it. No one says they have gotten into the program through high school or college advisement. When they do hear about the program, there is still a complicated registration process which stymies some. I have the impression that getting into the program is for many a hit-or-miss process.

Students enroll in Banking and Finance for many reasons and for combinations of reasons. For some it is one more certificate selected from the community college smorgasbord of possible vocations—another piece of paper, they say, to give them some insurance in an unpredictable job market. Others come because they are required to by some outside agency: They must show proof of enrollment to get government assistance, for example, or they have failed a military entrance exam and thus have to go back to school for some credits. For these students, banking is as good as anything else and

actually more interesting and practical than many courses of study; this is true regardless of the fact that they sometimes say they do not plan on ever working in a bank. Other students come because they are pursuing an A.A. degree and think Banking and Finance will round out their studies in useful ways. For example, students have told us they want to open their own small businesses eventually—a child-care center, a hair salon—and they see the program as providing practical information on finance.

But the great majority of students in this program are there for another reason: because they have heard that at the end of the program you will get a job. As the instructor explained, and as I heard time and again from students, the draw of the program is the chance to work, and it happens like this:[3]

"I got a job."

"Where you workin'?"

"At the bank."

"How'd you get that job?"

"Oh I got that job through Banking and Finance. Yeah, you know Mr. Parker? Well, go down and see him, he'll get you a job."

The Banking and Finance program consists of lecture and discussion, in which the instructor goes over some fifteen "modules": Mr. Parker presents information on bank careers and opportunities—what are the jobs you can expect to apply for at a bank? He spends the most time on banking procedures and operations—how to open and close as a teller and the various customer transactions, like issuing and paying travelers' checks and opening new accounts. The course ends with interviewing techniques and employee-

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[3]Throughout this report I have used direct quotes extensively in an attempt to let the voices of participants come through. Most often, these quotes are verbatim transcriptions, but on occasion I have eliminated, for ease of reading, back channel cues such as "uh" and "you know" where these omissions did not seem to me to obscure anything of significance in the interaction. Throughout I have used the following transcription conventions:

– interruptions, overlaps
. . . within sections, omitted talk
(. . .) between sections, omitted talk
[laughing] commentary to help explain dialogue
(I hope) researcher's best guess
( ) incomprehensible speech
oh no emphasized by speaker

employer relations. Each of these lectures/discussions has a lab. Students practice telling, proof-operating, machine calculation, and interviewing; some of these labs feature characteristics of a currently revalued form of teaching and learning called "cognitive apprenticeship" (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989).

Here, for example, are some snippets of talk from a videotaping in which Mr. Parker coaches students in a simulated bank-telling exercise. As some students are pretending to be the customers and others the tellers, Mr. Parker presides from behind the bank counter, pointing out errors in a nonthreatening fashion, helping students accomplish tasks they cannot yet do on their own, and telling personal illustrative stories from his collection of bank lore:

> Mr. Parker: *[calling out]* Alma, she gonna steal some of that money!
>
> Alma: I noticed that.
>
> Mr. Parker: So get rid of it. Have you verified *[laughter]*? The first thing you do is put away the money. The hand is quicker than the eye. Do your cash in. Did you do your cash in? And, and you put it on the cash blotter. How much has she given you?
>
> Alma: Two hundred and twenty-six dollars.
>
> Mr. Parker: Okay, now put your cash in, and see, and put your debits and credits together. Teller stamp. Do everything *[pulling away the savings account passbook]*. This the last thing you do. Forget her *[indicating the customer]*. You do your business. Because the moment you hand her that book she gonna walk away.
>
> Alma: Right.
>
> Customer: I'm gonna have to check to see if she hasn't made a mistake, too.
>
> Mr. Parker: Yeah, but the person I'm gonna come after is Alma. I'm not coming after you.
>
> Customer: I'm coming after her, too! *[more general laughter]*

All of the activities—the labs and lectures—take place in an atmosphere charged with immediacy and real-life applicability. Constantly, the instructor relates whatever concept he is teaching to the world beyond the classroom, through stories culled from his own experiences in corporate life and through hypothetical examples of what students can expect to encounter in a matter of weeks as they stand before an irate customer who is insisting

that you cash her check although she has no identification. In doing so, the teacher, who is African American, relies on characteristic black speech styles and speech events (Kochman, 1981), and he does so with great effectiveness for many of the students: "Mr. Parker, he makes this class interesting, he motivates me, he relates what we're doing to the real job," the students told us over and over again.

A large portion of time—a two-hour class each afternoon four times a week—is devoted to learning to use ten-key machines. That is, students practice the operation of calculating machines using a manual much like a typing book except with figures. Thus, they add and subtract columns of numbers and find their errors when they make transcription mistakes. The aim is first for accuracy and then for speed, for both skills will be required to operate the ten-key calculator on a proof-machine. Many students in the Banking and Finance program look forward to taking jobs as banktellers, but most of them go to work as proof-operators, people who with their left hand feed debit or credit slips and checks into a large machine the size of a refrigerator lying on its side, and with the right hand, key in the amounts of those slips on the ten-key calculator that is part of the machine. Accuracy is very important. As will be seen later, a worker's "incentive pay" is docked if he or she makes too many errors. Speed is paramount, too. Production is twelve-hundred items per hour—that is, each hour you must feed twelve-hundred slips of paper into the machine with one hand and key in the amounts with the other. If you do not make production, you will be fired, and if you do not exceed production—by processing sixteen-hundred or more slips per hour—you have no means of increasing your pay. The Banking and Finance program at Gateway College owns one ancient and often broken proof-operation machine on which students get to practice a little bit—probably less than an hour each during the entire program.

One more comment on the curriculum. The program included no instruction on reading, writing, or math—no "remedial" basic skills work—although Mr. Parker was concerned that sometimes students had difficulty doing the reading on the proof-operation test that was part of the banks' employment screening. He surmised that Asian students had the most difficulty because they had the most rudimentary reading skills due simply to second-language issues. A student would occasionally leave the Banking and Finance program and cycle back to a remedial literacy class in Gateway College, but this was a rarity. There did not seem to be much coordination among programs or at least not much student and instructor perception of such linking. If students did not have the reading,

writing, and math capabilities they needed, they simply dropped by the way. Mr. Parker was especially skeptical of the usefulness of remedial classes; he said such programs stigmatized students and offered little in the way of practical help. But he was equally adamant about not wanting the responsibility for basic skills instruction in his program and had, in fact, stopped administering a standard reading test at the outset of each semester. Early on, in a discussion of the literacy required for the banks' screening tests, he told us that he did not teach reading:

> Interviewer: Mr. Parker, you know what, this is a lot of reading.
>
> Mr. Parker: I know it is.
>
> Interviewer: This is a lot reading.
>
> Mr. Parker: I understand that. Reading. I understand that, sure. If you don't read it, you can't understand it. If you can't understand what you read, how you going to master the program? And I don't teach reading. Do you follow what I'm saying?
>
> Interviewer: Yeah. This is a lot reading to do that problem.
>
> Mr. Parker: Of course it is. Of course it is. Reading with understanding.
>
> Interviewer: And it's also very much like a test, you know.
>
> Mr. Parker: It is a test!
>
> Interviewer: I know. It's like a school test, you know.
>
> Mr. Parker: Right, right. It's all reading. Reading, reading is the key. Understanding, understanding what you've read.
>
> *[20 Second Pause]*
>
> Mr. Parker: And I don't teach reading.

Mr. Parker later told me that the reason he did not teach reading (and writing and civics and math) was a matter of pride; those were not his specialties; those were not things he knew. He saw himself as an expert on banking and finance, not basic skills or literacy.

The Teacher: "Let's talk business, let's talk ladylike."

The official curriculum is one way of understanding the Banking and Finance program—an account, that is, of the textbooks and syllabi and the content and style of

lectures and labs. But another way is to construct a sense of what the program means to its participants, including the teacher. Let us listen to how Mr. Parker describes the program, his role in it, and his relationship with his students. In the following excerpt Mr. Parker explains what he means by "polishing." Students already know everything they need to know when they come into my program, he claims; all they need is a little polishing.

> I get– I get a student in my class,
> I get a young lady in my class,
> she is 19, 20,
> uh, has worked part-time at various jobs and so forth,
> uh, and I do what I call an eyeball assessment
> and we sit and we talk:
>
> *Catherine, what have you done?*
>
> *Why, I've worked at McDonald's*
>
> *Why are you in this program?*
>
> *I need a job, I need to go to work,*
> *I need to take care of myself*
> *and I've done some things,*
> *uh, but I've had a lot of jobs*
> *and they didn't last that long. . .*
>
> and so forth.
>
> *What can you do?*
>
> *I've been a cashier.*
>
> *Where did you work?*
>
> *I worked at McDonald's,*
> *I worked at Kentucky Fried Chicken and QuickWay.*
>
> *Uh, do you have a résumé?*
>
> *No.*
>
> *Have you ever had a résumé?*
>
> *No.*
>
> *Let's do a résumé.*
> *I need to put you together on paper,*
> *I need to look at you on paper.*
>
> So we do the résumé,
> and I ask her to reconstruct her whole life work history,

show her how to put that in sequential order, last job first.
So she began to do that, and then I began to pull it out of her:

What did you do?

I worked at McDonald's.

What did you do at McDonald's?

Oh! I handled cash register.

What else?

Oh! I helped in the kitchen.

What else?

Uh, at the end of the day I helped my supervisor balance out the cash drawers.

What else did you do?

Sometimes I would take the deposit to the bank.

Aha! What else did you do?

Sometimes I was the receiving clerk when McDonald's come in with all of the the food and stuff for McDonald's, I, I'm the one that received it,
I'm the one who checked it off.

What else did you do?

I helped the manager make out the the list for next week to, to, to order the merchandise for McDonald's next week . . .

Because normally when you get a person like that they've done more than that, they've been more than just someone selling hamburgers . . . they never, they never perceive themselves as being nothing but a hamburger seller and, and kinda, and that's sorta demeaning, in a sense, you know, everybody sells hamburgers. But then when I start pullin it out of them,

What did you do?
Did you ever go to the bank, make deposits?

Oh yeah, a lot of times I had to go to the bank and make deposits.

There's a certain amount of trust there,
they don't send anybody to the bank to make deposits.

And so, Mr. Parker helps students to "articulate themselves." He helps them construct a new image of themselves, a positive one, because everyone else has given them a negative one previously; "it's all been negative," he says.

The image Mr. Parker helps students construct of themselves is not just to build their confidence, though that is surely crucial. He is also aiming to help them construct an image that the corporate world will find palatable. Here, for example, is an excerpt from a class discussion in which Mr. Parker teaches students how to conduct themselves in an interview:

> Mr. Parker: Don't sit down until somebody asks you to sit down. Don't take for granted that they want you to sit down. It's not that they don't want you to sit down, but that they have another office that they want you to go over to. So when you come in, you greet the interviewer. Always extend your hand, say "Good morning! How are you?" and wait for instruction. They're gonna normally say, "Please have a seat." Then that's when you sit down. And when you sit down–
>
> Class *[in scattered voices]:* Don't slump.
>
> Mr. Parker *[scrunches his face]:* Please don't slump! *[General laughter]* I mean, don't go to bed in the seat. *[Pulls a chair over to a student]* When you sit down *[he sits down and crosses his legs]*, sit down nice and erect. *[Stands up and goes over to Jackie.]* Jackie, have a seat. You've just walked into the office. *[Jackie goes to the chair]* Have a seat, please. *[Gestures to the seat with a ruler and Jackie sits down.]* Okay. *[to class]* Watch her legs. *[to Jackie]* Sit down. *[to class]* Watch her legs. *[to Jackie]* How are you gonna sit?
>
> Jackie: I can't sit like that the whole interview.

One kind of skill that is taught in the Banking and Finance program might be called "corporate literacy"—how to act, carry oneself, and speak in appropriate ways in the world of high finance. At one point, Mr. Parker described to me the way he shaped LaReisha, his most recalcitrant student: "Wow, wait a minute," he admonished her, "don't talk to me like that, let's talk banking, let's talk business, let's talk ladylike." He invents scenarios and plays them out for students, modeling the correct and expected behavior. Thus, he tells students what to do in an interview or how to react in particular circumstances—for example, if your boss asks you to wash the dishes in the bank's kitchenette: "This is just a part of the job that everyone will have to do sooner or later," he counseled, "so don't take offense."

Mr. Parker sees this socialization as a necessary means to an end—getting students off welfare, out of poverty, and into work. When I once commented to Mr. Parker that it seemed to me that students in the program were learning how to struggle, he quickly responded that, no, he was teaching students how to survive, and he went on to defend his approach this way:

> I, I tell my students
> I'm, I'm, I'm not concerned with theory.
> To hell with theory.
> I'm a practitioner,
> I don't want to teach no theory.
> If you want theory, go up to Cal.
> I'm teaching practical application:
> pay the rent, and a loaf of bread,
> that's what I'm teaching.
> Because you gonna need
> some money to pay the rent and a loaf of bread,
> and my students understand this.
> Don't talk to me about no theory,
> don't talk to me about "Much Ado about Nothing," Shakespeare.
> If you wanna do that, fine, that's good to do,
> and it's fine to know all of the sonnets and all of the plays by Shakespeare.
> You can't sell it at Safeway.
> When you go to Safeway,
> they don't want to hear the sonnets,
> they want to know if you got two dollars and fifty cents for a loaf of bread.
> Those students understand that, Doctor,
> they understand it a hell of a lot better than me and you do
> 'cause they've gone through it.
> That's right, when your daughter wakes up in the morning sneezing
> and's gotta, gotta a fever of 110,
> you've got to get her somewhere,
> and if you don't have insurance
> they're gonna send you to Highland [Hospital]
> and you're gonna stand out in the hallway.
> Is that what you want?
> If you don't, you better listen,
> you better balance the sheet so you can get a job,
> and, and my students understand that.
> My . . . Brenda, you've interviewed Brenda?
> Yesterday morning:
>
> > *Mr. Parker, I got a problem.*
> >
> > *Yes Brenda.*
> >
> > *My house has fungus all around the wall.*
> > *I have told the landlord about this.*
> > *My clothes have mildewed, my shoes have mildewed, everything has mildewed. What can I do?*

Yes, the house she live in has mildewed 'cause it's been rainin'
and because the land–it's absentee ownership, right?–
he hasn't fixed the house
so when it rained, the water came through the wall, right?
What goes up comes down,
it settled along the wall and now it's mildewed and now it's chipping
and the clothes in the close–she open the closet door up–
that's life, that's real.
So I have to go through this whole thing with Brenda in the class:

Brenda, you've got to go back to the landlord.
Remember, I said never pay in cash, pay in check,
and, and without threatening say, "Well, if you don't do it, then I'll get it done and I'll take it out of the rent money."
That'll get his attention.
Okay that's one of the ways, that's one of the ways you can do it.
He promise you–
no you make him put it in writing–
because if you ever go to court ,
"he said, she said, I said" won't stand up in court.
You got to have something in writing.

I've got to go through this whole thing.
Brenda's got a problem,
she's got mildew in her house.

Students in Mr. Parker's class do have problems, and poor housing is just one of them. Getting students jobs in banks as proof-operators and tellers is, in Mr. Parker's view, a possible solution. He sees these jobs as entry into the powerful world of banking—a job of a different kind than turning burgers—a job with some possibility of advancement:

Interviewer: You know, it's really neat to see the, uh, see these students being able to move up.

Mr. Parker: Yeah, right. See, that's what I mean. Uh-huh, see, the whole, the whole idea, as I said, if, if nothing else. It's not that they're just gonna stay there in one position. There's a lot of room, a lot of mobility so they can move from–

Interviewer: Wh–, what's the cap on the mobility? I mean, is there, do you see, uh, a limit to where they can go?

Mr. Parker: No. No, there is no limit, but you can put limits on yourself.

Interviewer: OK.

Mr. Parker: And by that, anything, you got to go to school. It's like anywhere else. . . . This lady I had yesterday from Western Bank. She said, "I started out as a clerk/typist."

Interviewer: Is that–, is that right?

Mr. Parker: Yes! Absolutely. I mean, this is, this is not uncommon in banking. She started as a clerk/typist. She said, I had good typing skills, uh, and I had taken some shorthand, and then she became an executive. She went from a clerk/typist to an executive secretary. From an executive secretary she left, and I don't know if she moved into the loan. Now she's an assistant vice-president of Western Bank. And, again, she pointed out, they sent her to school. The bank paid. The bank paid for my Master's. I got my Master's. That's a fact. If you stick with it. Now, you got to prepare yourself, just like anything else.

When pressed, when confronted with the poor success rate of a particular group of students—these students had trouble keeping their jobs in banks, not to mention moving up—Mr. Parker had a number of responses. Sometimes he pointed to yet another "exception"—a student who had persevered and made it. Other times he attacked the public assistance system and his students' motivation, saying that people were tempted to stay at home and come to Gateway College for a few courses now and then and collect their welfare checks each month instead of getting out of bed and going to work. Sometimes his attack would include a disturbing polemic against African-American women whom he said on more than one occasion were in league with white men.

But, most often, Mr. Parker returned to the aforementioned theme of instilling self-confidence and a new self-image. He believed that students who went through his program and on to a job at a bank reaped lasting and significant benefits in terms of new belief in themselves. "I don't really care if they don't stay in the bank but two months," he once told me. "They still got something out of it. Now they know they can do something: they can get up in the morning and put on lipstick, and go to work just like other people." Similarly, when confronted with the sweatshop-like conditions of working as a proof-operator—high pressure, no benefits, rigid rules—Mr. Parker was apt to say again and again, "Something's better than nothing. Something's better than nothing."

The Employers: "I tell them the sky's the limit."

In many ways the personnel managers of local banks shared Mr. Parker's attitudes about the opportunities available to students who got jobs as proof-operators and tellers. Here is Mrs. Lavelle, who worked for Bank of the Pacific, describing the possibility of promotion:

> Mrs. Lavelle: And what, uh, Mr. Parker usually have us do also, he'll ask us and I'll usually . . . come over and maybe just talk to the class and tell them a little about Bank of the Pacific and, uh, tell them that they can move up. That the sky is the limit. It's up to them, it's–, you know, it depends upon what they want out of life–. . . . There's another, uh, young lady that I can remember when she was also in Mr. Parker's program. I remember her name, R–Roslin Tabor, a extremely bright young lady and she was working, uh, down at Jack London Square, I'm trying to think of this restaurant, but she was working as a cashier there and she was going to school here–, uh, attending the banking program. And we hired her as a cashier in, uh, the cash vault, as a cash handler.
>
> Interviewer: Mmhmm.
>
> Mrs. Lavelle: And I, uh, me and several other ladies, we went on a tour over at 105 Smith Street and the cash vault was one of the areas, you know, that we toured and there was Roslin, Head Teller.
>
> Interviewer: Ohh! *[laughs]*
>
> Mrs. Lavelle: In a cage, you know, overseeing about eight other employees. And she waved to me and I asked her how did she like her job. She says, "Oh, I love it," and she was just–, I mean, she was so excited about it, and she was telling me her goals, that she was going to continue with her education because she wanted to do something with her life–
>
> Interviewer: –Mmmhmm, mmhmm.
>
> Mrs. Lavelle: Very, very impressed with her and she's still going to school. . . . And then, we just hired, let's see, when was this, I guess about, mmm, it was in October. Uh, October or November, we hired, uh, a young lady from, uh, one of the banking classes here also and she, at the time, was seventeen, with a child and she told me that she was, you know, living on her own. And we hired her as a proof-operator trainee and I understand that she's doing great.
>
> Interviewer: Mmm, mmm. Yeah.
>
> Mrs. Lavelle: I haven't talked to her, but, uh, the manager of the unit has told me that she's one of her best students.

Here is further testimony from Mrs. Lavelle:

Mrs. Lavelle: And we've got– we've really had people that I've hired here through Gateway College, uh, they have ( ), they have moved on–

Interviewer: –mmhmm, mmhmm–

Mrs. Lavelle: –they have been promoted and they started out with entry-level jobs. . . . I do know of, uh, several people that, uh, that are in management now–

Interviewer: –Ahh! Now that's very–, that's really powerful. That's really powerful–

Mrs. Lavelle: –Mmmhmm–

Interviewer: –that people can begin as a proof-operator and move through the, move through the–

Mrs. Lavelle: –they can–

Interviewer: –through the bank.

Mrs. Lavelle: Or as a mail, uh, carrier. Uh, it happens.

In the same way that Mr. Parker hoped to initiate students into the discourse of banking, giving them a new self-image and helping them to "articulate themselves," Mrs. Lavelle viewed working at a bank as continuing and deepening that socialization. And she viewed this socialization as a kind of service to society:

Mrs. Lavelle: You know, I enjoy–, it gives me a, a sense of satisfaction to see that we have this program. In a sense I guess you could say Bank of the Pacific has been a part of it, and we have taken students, we've employed them, and they've been developed–

Interviewer: –mmhmm, mmhmm–

Mrs. Lavelle: –and . . . they've ended up being productive–

Interviewer: –mmhmm–

Mrs. Lavelle: –in our society–

Interviewer: –mmhmm, mmhmm, mmhmm, mmhmm.

Mrs. Lavelle: Really, you know.

Interviewer: That's satisfying.

Mrs. Lavelle: Yeah, it– it is, it's rewarding. It really is.

I asked Mrs. Lavelle and other bank personnel about the need for reading and writing and literacy-related skills in jobs for proof-operators and banktellers. This kind of question seemed to surprise most people and elicited a range of answers. These employers seemed to take for granted the need to read on the job, at least at a "basic" level:

> Interviewer: Uh, do you, is there a particular reading level that people have to make? I mean, people talk about like eighth-grade reading level, tenth-grade reading level–
>
> Mrs. Lavelle: –we don't even get into that, you know, as long as they can– I mean, if they can read and understand what, uh, you know–
>
> Interviewer: –on the–
>
> Mrs. Lavelle: –you know, on the job. We're not talking about, you know, becoming a professor–

I also learned, however, that on-the-job training involves the use of thick manuals that students must be able to decipher well enough to be tested on. One manager from a different local bank said,

> We have tons of training manuals. I mean, there's drawers and drawers and drawers and drawers and drawers of them. And we give those out to the employee. If they're so willing to learn, then they will take those home and begin to learn those, but you've got to spend some time with them, explaining what they don't understand.

Mrs. Bork, the trainer at Bank of the Pacific's Proof-Operation Center, said she just assumed students could read these manuals, and at any rate, they could take them home to study off the job which she supposed would allow them to get help with reading if they needed it. Mrs. Bork claimed little or no writing was required of proof-operators—just document completion and the checking off of boxes on forms. But Mrs. Lavelle maintained that writing was required, depending on the particular job, "Being able to read is definitely going to be important, and writing, also, because we do a lot of writing, so like if . . . inner unit memos, um, and then that depends upon the job that you have."

Both managers spoke about the importance of mastering job-related language:

> Mrs. Lavelle: There's certain languages that the, um, I should say–, how should I put this, uh, uh, well within any company, you have, you know, you use, uh, you abbreviate words or–
>
> Interviewer: –yeah, oh, the jargon of the company–

Mrs. Lavelle: –yes, that's it, like if I'm talking to somebody that's not within the company, then they wouldn't even understand what I was talking about if I said, oh, well, uh, this should go to, uh, PPP, which is Payroll, uh, Personnel Payroll Processing. You wouldn't understand that, but someone that–

Interviewer: –mmhmm, right–

Mrs. Lavelle: –that's with the company would. And so it's . . . just so many things that they will just automatically pick up.

Mrs. Bork thought this requirement might be especially hard on Asian students who did not have good English reading skills. But, while the proof-center did not care much whether their employees could speak English, this issue was raised as important in relation to some tellers:

Mrs. Lavelle: One of my, uh, coworkers, she staffs for the branches, and she hires for tellers, which are now called customer service reps . . . and he, uh, this young man, he scored, uh, I think it was like ninety something on the test, and that was the highest that anyone has ever scored, for this particular teller's test, but they could not hire him because of his communication skills, well, not as teller, so she wanted to know if, um, I had something. And uh, perhaps like in the cash vault, there's a cash handler and he would have been great for it, but right now all of the jobs in that area, uh, have been filled, so I've–, I have his application and if, you know, something comes available, then I will, uh, give him a call and I did talk to him. He has, uh, umm, a really– really thick accent and uh–

Interviewer: –is he A–, is he Asian?

Mrs. Lavelle: Yes, he is. And um, but his math is–

Interviewer: –Ahh, yeah–

Mrs. Lavelle: –You know, he did, you know, great–

Interviewer: –yeah–

Mrs. Lavelle: –but we will be able to do something for him, but just not in that particular area.

Interviewer: So there– there wouldn't be then training, uh, through B of P, for communication skills? *[laughter]* No. That's something you get when, you know, that's some–

Mrs. Lavelle: Yeah, but see, then that's why, like, um, they have a lot of schools that offer, uh, what–, English as a Second Language–

Interviewer: –Oh yeah, yeah.

Mrs. Lavelle: Even here in Gateway College, uh, but we–, you know, but that, I mean, but you know, well, we don't–, we don't discriminate, that's for sure–

Interviewer: –right *[laughs]*

Mrs. Lavelle: –so we, you know, we try to place that individual in a area–

Interviewer: –where he can–

Mrs. Lavelle: –right, uh-huh, where they would, you know, uh, be rewarding for everybody, but it makes it, you know, it's much better if they can continue to go to school and master it.

Mrs. Bork also recognized that communication skills were important for tellers, while they did not matter for proof-operators, and went on to point out that training was consequently different for the two positions:

> As a teller you have to be understood well by your customer, you have to be– present yourself well, you have to be able to understand when they *[the customers]* get excited and upset with you. My proof-operators don't have to do that. . . . I don't have to smile at my machine every day. I don't have to call my machine by name. . . . If you want to be a teller, I'm going to train you totally differently.

In this last quote, Mrs. Lavelle mentioned an employment test for tellers. Bank of the Pacific also tests its applicants for proof-operator positions, as do other banks. In fact, one of the stumbling blocks for students in Mr. Parker's class was this proof-operation test. The timed test consisted of addition and subtraction problems that students were to work with their ten-key machines as well as visual discriminations like the following items:

Column A	Same	Different	Column B
1. 25	S	D	25
2. $32.01	S	D	$31.01
3. XQ55543	S	D	XQ55542
4. Mr. Bob Santini	S	D	Mr. Bob Santinni

On this portion you are supposed to quickly determine whether numbers and letters on the left are different from those on the right. The final portion of the test gave students the most difficulty, for it required applicants to do a lot of reading and direction following,

as well as to negotiate rather tricky test-taking conventions. For example, the test reproduced a credit slip and several checks, with errors embedded in this imaginary banking transaction. Students had to interpret this rather complicated visual display, as well as select their answers from a multiple choice list of the "A but not B" or "A and B but not C" variety, and all of this under time constraints. (Screening tests given by other banks present different problems. For example, one test an applicant took included rather obscure questions on grammar and usage such as the distinction between *who* and *that* in relative clauses.)

Across the board, the representatives of local banks were pleased with Mr. Parker's program and students from the program whom they hired. In fact, these employers came to Mr. Parker's defense at one advisory board meeting in which some administrators at Gateway College proposed that the Banking and Finance program be revised, specifically that it be broadened to include more theory on banking and less practice of the sort students received in ten-key classes. One new course was to be called "Principles of Bank Operation" and another, "Bank Management." The rationale for this revision was that such a curriculum would put those students who so desired a better position to transfer from the community college to the state university or university system. Mrs. Lavelle and the other board members were adamant in their support of Mr. Parker, who also opposed the proposed changes. They claimed not to care whether students knew "Principles of Bank Operation," but, rather, said they needed people who got to work on time. Students who are interested in bank management are not the kind of people we want as tellers and proof-operators, added another personnel manager. Someone else claimed that Mr. Parker's program gave students an edge over people who just walked in off the street, and this edge was all they needed. And Mrs. Lavelle warned that if the proposed curriculum changes were enacted, the employers would simply go some place else—some place where they could get what they wanted. The end of this story is that Gateway College's administration backed off, and the vocational program in Banking and Finance continues in a manner approved by its advisory board.

The Workplace: "I'm hiring you as an hourly."

The proof-operation center of Bank of the Pacific is housed on the twelfth floor of a large, modern, imposing office building in a Bay Area city. Its entrance is closely guarded

twenty-four hours a day; to gain access to the elevator you must have a special card, as well as a badge that specifies an official connection to the bank. When you step into the twelfth-floor proof-center, you have an immediate purview of the whole operation—row after orderly row of proof-operation machines (138 to be exact) and a sea of female faces operating them.

The best time to see this center is late on a Friday night, around 11:00 p.m., when every machine is sure to be clattering and humming. Banks do a lot of business on Fridays, which means that proof-operators will work hard afterwards. The proof-operators at this center work by the hour with no benefits. Mrs. Bork stated, "We don't offer benefits hardly at all anymore and we're not the only company doing that. Benefits are expensive for a company." She also pointed out that "a proof-operator who works eight hours a day is not as effective as a proof-operator who works six hours a day." The bank wants a person who still has a burst of speed left at the end, and that also argues for part-time workers. Mrs. Bork promises her employees fifteen hours a week; she says, "Up front I'm telling you I don't plan to give you very much in the end. I'm hiring you as an hourly." Proof-operators come to work around 4:00 p.m. and stay until the work is done, which may be 1:00 a.m. on a Saturday morning. Mrs. Bork admits that

> Here our hours aren't the best in the world. We've got later hours than anybody else. Tremendous transportation problems when you are outside the metropolitan area. If you don't have transportation, you can forget it. People need to have some kind of mobility.

Furthermore, proof-operators work when the bank needs them as projected by historical records. "That last week of the month when there isn't much work, I'm going to work you Sunday, Monday, and Wednesday and that's it," says Mrs. Bork.

What proof-operators actually do is feed debit or credit slips through a machine, simultaneously key in the amount of the debit or credit on the ten-key calculator which is part of the machine, and encode a number designating the type of transaction. These slips come in bundles from branch banks and customers; the bundles are weighed and the amount of time in which they should be processed is generated by a computer program according to their weight. Some bundles are "cleaner" than others, that is, they contain fewer errors. Errors might be a bank teller's mistake or a customer's mistake—for example, a mistake in addition or subtraction: You fill out your deposit slip as $450.00 when the check you are depositing actually reads $452.02. Whatever the source of the

errors, "the buck stops here," jokes Mrs. Bork. Proof-operators must correct those errors, key-in the correct amounts, and route the debit and credit slips through the machine, where they are photographed and spat out into one of three pockets, depending on their designation. All this happens very, very rapidly, when a proof-operator is making production. All you see is a blur of papers and fingers.

Operators start out at $6.20 an hour. For eight weeks they go through training, which involves both hands-on practice with proof-machines, studying manuals, and memorizing codes for ninety-eight separate documents. And then they are put out on the floor. At this point, they should be able to process between four- and five-hundred items an hour, and if they are not able to, "they really struggle" according to Mrs. Bork. At three months, they must process eight-hundred items an hour or they are let go. Final production quota is sixteen-hundred items an hour, but people do more for incentive pay. The highest rate that Mrs. Bork has seen is three thousand per hour, but she says that with the simplification of the process—her bank is now changing from a "multiple pocket sort" to a "single pocket sort"—the rate keeps pushing up. According to Mrs. Bork, this move toward simplification has resulted in de-skilling:

> In banking, you don't need to know as much [as in the old days]. In other words, proof-operators don't do anything else; that's the only job they need to know. It's much more specialized and centralized; it's much cheaper all the way around.
>
> (. . .)
>
> When I started in proof . . . in 1962 . . . we had a machine that sorted thirty-two pockets. . . . We're working towards a one-pocket sort [at Bank of the Pacific]. Western Bank has been on a one-pocket sort for years. We've been cutting down slowly, from thirty-two pockets, down.

Not only is speed important, workers must be accurate as well. Proof-operators are fired for making too many errors, or their incentive pay is docked. Mrs. Bork mentions taking a person's incentive pay because of errors: "If they make three errors in a month, I take a third of their incentive pay away."

There are other ways to lose the job, and one of them is not being on time. Mrs. Bork explains:

> In proof, we have people come in exactly when we need them. We have an extremely tough [tardiness/attendance policy], well, it's not unacceptable but it's very strong, and we stick to it. You don't abuse our attendance or

our tardiness guidelines or you don't have a job. And we're very strict on the first three months.

In fact, Mr. Parker likens the bank's rules to his experiences in the military:

Well, what happens when they get to the bank; they're in an entirely different environment because of–, it means that they have to, uh, yeah well it's a–, well like, I guess you could say it's like a regimented environment because, uh, there are things that they have to do, uh, attendance, uh, make sure they're– they get to work on time, um, they, uh, meet a different set of people all together, uh, then they're trained, on the job, and their values are different. I mean, everything about them change.

Students who worked at the bank talked about being watched, feeling their supervisor's eyes on them waiting for them to make mistakes or steal the occasional currency that students believed was deliberately planted in their work bundles. Here is Alma talking about traps:

Alma: They always set a trap for you. OK, like you have a, they put a fifty-dollar bill in there, in your bundle of work, you just stick it in your pocket, you know you're gone.

Interviewer: Did you have one in yours?

Alma: Sure! They did that. I saw it run through the machine. I knew what it was. I stopped the machine, and I called a supervisor and told her what had happened. She came in, she look at the bill, she say "OK, of course you got to sign for it, you know." It's amazing how they, they'll set traps for you. . . . There's cameras every place, everywhere.

Interviewer: How could you stand to work being watched so much?

Alma: I, it didn't bother me 'cause I didn't want to take any money.

The demands to produce and be accurate, the strict rules about tardiness, workers' perceptions that they were being watched, all combined to produce a very pressured work environment: Here is Mrs. Bork's description:

There is a burn-out rate in proof-operators. . . . It is an extremely pressured job. I mean, you have to clock in when you walk in the door on a log and you clock every movement you make. I mean, if you get up and go to the bathroom, it comes out of your run time. . . . We have deadlines to meet, and our deadlines . . . are always very tight, so you're always pushing your people at the end of the day.

The working conditions themselves are perhaps enough to cause heavy turnover in a proof-center, which, in turn, requires constant training of new employees. But Mrs. Bork takes this all rather philosophically: "There's always going to be turnover any place in the bank, especially when you're in this large of an office." Besides, she also mentions, if we did not have turnover, "it would make me unemployed."

The Students

In the next sections, I present the stories of four African-American women and two young men, one Chinese American and one African American, as their expectations about the course and future jobs in a bank interact with the curriculum of Banking and Finance and the reality of proof-operating.

Most of the women in this program fall into two age groups. The first group is comprised of women in their early twenties with very young children. The second is made up of women in their late thirties to early fifties, who are also single and have growing or grown children. The men are mostly young, just out of high school or in their early twenties. Most of the students or their families survive with the help of government subsidies. Most of them live in neighborhoods like the one in which Jackie, the subject of our first narrative, lives. Mr. Parker described that neighborhood as he drove us through it:

> I am in the heart of the drug scene, I am right in the heart. I mean seriously, my brother lives on ( ) Street on the right, three blocks down there. . . . This is the heart of the drive-bys, shoot(ings), and crack houses, right down here, see the police? . . . This is the worst part, this is East Oakland.
>
> (. . .)
>
> They're young Blacks that has no hope, have taken to the streets, and taken to drugs to make it. The young girls, coming from school here, their chances is slim and none.

Jackie: "The third time I was three minutes late."

Jackie had been out of high school for two years when she enrolled in Banking and Finance. She had been accepted to San Francisco State University out of high school, but because she did not receive sufficient and timely financial aid, she was unable to attend. Then she became pregnant and waited until her baby was a year old to resume her

schooling, which she knew she needed, even though she was somewhat intimidated by the prospect. She says she received a good high school education where the faculty was like "family" and where she was required to complete academically challenging work such as ten-page papers. But Jackie had not always wanted to attend college. Not until a career class in high school changed her mind. She also worried that she was not "smart enough" for college:

> It's scary. It's scary. I was going to live on campus, you know. I was scared, I didn't think I was going to do real good in my classes and all of that, I wasn't smart enough. That's the real reason why. I was scared to go, scared, scared.

Her past job experiences included working at a child-care center in a nearby park, working as a janitor at the local army base, handing out free lunches for Parks and Recreation, working at an insurance agency, and perhaps most memorable for her, working at McDonald's.

The semester in which she enrolled in Mr. Parker's class was her second at the community college. She found out about the course while reading through the college catalogue. She had always wanted to work in a bank, she told us, but as she put it, "It's not easy to get a job in a bank." She wanted to work at a bank, she said, because she likes to work with money. She also wanted to work in an environment that was different from the one she experienced as a high school student working at McDonald's:

> Jackie: It seems more pleasant, like say . . . you wonder (why) I want to work with money behind a cash register, I'd rather work at a bank than work at McDonald's, you know, it's a peaceful, more peaceful environment.
>
> Interviewer: Have you ever worked at McDonald's?
>
> Jackie: Uh huh, yeah, it was a lot of problems, you know, customers talking about "I didn't order this" and . . . you heard this, you know, get into arguments with the customer, hey, you know, the customer always right. Most times I had to go get a manager because it was like a Korean lady or something, she ordered like ten Big Macs, five McDLT's, and stuff, you know, and I gave her her order and she said "I didn't say this, I didn't say that." I said, "Well, that's what I thought you said." You know, she didn't have to talk to me the way she did, so I just went to get a manager, I didn't argue with her or nothing.

Jackie also said she was enrolled in Banking and Finance because she needed a job immediately, and she considered a job in a bank a good one, a possible career position:

> *I was just going to school to find out what I wanted to do (first semester).* First, I had wanted to major in child care, child development, and I said . . . it's going to take too long and I need a job now, a good job, because like in banks, you know, banks is all over the nation, you'll always have a job. Once you work in a bank, I feel you could, you know, always work in the bank, if you had a good experience, you know, be at work all the time, you know, like say work in a bank for two years instead of just a month, keep on transferring the banks. . . .
>
> Right now, I need, I need a job now and stuff. So I can help me pay my rent and stuff, but if I was, you know, like try to get an A.A. you know, right now, if I get a certificate then I could start working, if I was to get an A.A. you know, I'd have to stay in the school for two years, you know, take all the A.A. requirements, them plus the requirements to become a banker, you know, like all the accounting classes and stuff, right now, but we just taking this class right here. In May, I'll finish and get a certificate, then I can start working. . . . Much easier, shorter.

Jackie had worked the semester before we met her, but her transportation problems were almost insurmountable. Here she describes those problems:

> First, I was going to school, and taking my baby to child care, and I was working at UPS at night, I was catching fourteen buses a day last semester. Take my baby to school, then go to school, then go home for a little while, then eat and stuff, then go pick my baby up, drop him off at the babysitter, go to work, go pick up my baby, go home, all day long every day, fourteen buses, you know, like if I want to go pick up I mean take my baby to school, I got to catch the 40, then I got to transfer to the 14, then I got to get on 14 again, and then get on 40 to go to school, all semester.
>
> (. . .)
>
> If I get a car, you know, I get another night job, and start, and get extra money, and stuff, but catching those buses like that, I was like getting at home 11:30 every night, you know, it's all cold outside, me and my baby on the bus, I didn't like it really. . . . (Just) trying to get my baby some stuff for Christmas.

When she enrolled in Banking and Finance the following semester, she decided not to work. Rather, she attended school full-time, depending on governmental assistance and credit for education to see her through. Transportation was no longer such a problem for her then.

Jackie passed the proof-operator test with ease, was interviewed for the position of proof-operator, and hired by Bank of the Pacific. Within two months of having been placed in this position, however, she was given the choice of resigning or being fired. She was asked to leave because she had been late to work three times in the sixty days she had been there, the last time by three minutes, as she explains in an interview after she was fired:

> Interviewer: How long did you work there?
>
> Jackie: Something like two months, I think it was two months, at the most, because I was late three times, and I had gotten fired. You know how you be on probation for ninety days? Before that ninety days was up, I was late three times.
>
> (. . .)
>
> The third time I was three minutes late.

Once she had gotten a job at Bank of the Pacific, her transportation problem had reappeared. Now she had to catch rapid transit (BART) to get to the city. She explains why she was late to work three times in two months:

> I had to drop him [the baby] off, then go way out there, sometimes we had to be there at 2:30, sometimes 3:30, and BART, sometimes the BART comes five minutes apart, then sometimes they come fifteen apart, you know.
>
> (. . .)
>
> I had got a car too, then I started going out driving out to West Oakland to the BART station and you know, leaving my car at the BART still catching the BART but catching it out of West Oakland because you know it was cheaper, faster for me to get there, you know, and on Fridays, you know, the BART closes at twelve o'clock, and we was getting off work like at one o'clock, 12:30 so you know I had to drive out to San Francisco on Friday. We had the carpool and stuff.
>
> (. . .)
>
> It was kinda too far, too, before I had got my car, like at nighttime, then I have, you know, get off the BART, get on the bus, then go get him at one or two o'clock in the morning, then come home.

Mr. Parker was aware of the transportation problems his students faced, and he even knew in particular of Jackie's difficulties. He noted that transportation is more of a problem for the women he places than for the men. In the following excerpt from an

interview conducted while Jackie was still employed by the bank, he brings up her transportation problem and relates it to a similar problem of another student placed in the same job:

> Mr. Parker: Jackie's doing wonderful, Jackie's doing fine, she's doing fine. Their only concern is Friday night, tonight. They don't get off until one o'clock. And there's no transportation. The BART trains stop running at 12:00.
>
> Interviewer: So what will they do?
>
> Mr. Parker: They commute, but they carpool. But as a new student they kinda reluctant. Don't know a lot of people. The guys, doesn't matter. But the girls now. One of my older students in my other class, Lorraine, the one I told you was my top student in my other class. She called me today because she has had a conflict with one of the girl's boyfriend. As she puts it, he tried to put the make on her, so she said, "I won't ride with him any more," and so I'm having, she's having to find another ride.
>
> (. . .)
>
> The situation's unfortunate, that she's put in a situation where she may have to succumb to getting in the car, riding with him, being subjected to something she's not pleased with at this point. . . .

In addition to the problem of reliable transportation, Jackie had problems with added expenditures resulting from working in a large city a considerable distance from home. The first of these was the added cost of transportation. Eating meals in San Francisco and paying for child care in the evenings also added to the cost of this job:

> Jackie: It costed to go to that job, though, because . . . after I got off the bus I had used to just get a thirty dollar bus pass. I started, ah, you know, using gas for my car, and then the BART, and then you got to eat your dinner there, you know, eat there, then you got to catch the BART back home. It was like four dollars a day for just BART. . . . And then, um, I was paying like say fifteen dollars a week for gas, and then if I had to drive out there, that would be five extra dollars and stuff. It was costing though, and then you know lunch time you got to spend three or more dollars just to eat and stuff. It costed every day, but then when your check came, it all broke out even.

Jackie's transportation problem revolved around child care. The only free daycare facility that supplied meals and diapers required two buses. In addition, proof-operating is a night job and free daycare closes at 5:30 p.m., so she had to pay for a babysitter during the evening hours and pick up her child in the wee hours of the morning. Mr. Parker noted this:

Mr. Parker: The basic thing is to be able to take care of her child, to get him where she won't have to be worrying about him when she's at work.

Jackie: Um hm, like I was last time.

Mr. Parker: See, that's an added burden.

Although Jackie was optimistic about her earnings, there was a real question of whether her salary from the bank would support her and her child, especially considering these additional expenses.

Jackie: We was on part-time, we really like, we don't get no benefits or nothing, but once you get on prime-time and then get full-time, you get more benefits and everything. Dental, all that.

Interviewer: By working part-time, did you make enough money to support yourself?

Jackie: I think, if I would have kept, yeah, yeah, it would have been enough, um hm, it would have been enough to pay for like four hundred dollars in rent here, twenty dollars on PG&E *[gas and electricity]*, like thirty on the telephone bill. If it was like that every month, you know, I could have made it with that, you know, because we was only working like six and four hours. If I would have been working eight hours or something I really could have bought food and everything, bought a car and everything, but, it was enough.

Holding out hopes of going back to work at the bank, Jackie chose to resign rather than to be fired so that Bank of the Pacific could conceivably rehire her in another position at a later date. Mr. Parker supported her hopes in this direction:

Jackie: I'm going back looking again cause that's where I want to work. I want to work in a bank.

Mr. Parker: I can get Jackie a job in a bank, just from a personal reference. Um, the only thing my–, I hope this is a real learning thing for her. Meaning–

Jackie: –I know, when I got fired.

Mr. Parker: You gotta be there, see *(laughs)*, see, you gotta be there. That's the bottom line. Uh, I can get her a job in a bank. We–, first of all, she's got a very nice personality and that's what they really want. She knows ( ) and she's articulate and she'll be a good person in customer service and now she knows what she has to do any more, it'll be different this time around–

Interviewer: –mmhmm–

Mr. Parker: –So we can work that. That's no problem.

Jackie is now at home with her child, living on public assistance and some help from her child's father.

Alma: "Most people are right-handed."

Now in her late forties or early fifties, Alma was born and raised in Arkansas. She had her first child in 1970, and her youngest is thirteen and still in school. In Arkansas, she attended segregated schools. After high school, she went to live with her sister in St. Louis, attending college there briefly before coming to California and raising her family. Alma has worked as an attendant in a rest home and as a teacher's aide in the Oakland Public Schools. Before coming to Gateway College, she was in a computer skills and basic literacy training program for nine months. Like Jackie, she is in the Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program for employment training. (GAIN is a California program which requires women with school-age children to attend training programs in order to continue to receive public assistance.)

Alma decided to enroll in the Banking and Finance program because it caught her eye when she was flipping through the "brochure." She thought she would be good at banking because she enjoys working with numbers and likes working with people; moreover, she thought that the environment would be pleasant: "It's a more respectful environment, so it seemed like they should, they give you respect. . . . By you being there behind the counter you have the authority." She planned to work her way up in the bank from proof-operator, as Mr. Parker had explained in class. In her first interview, she reveals this vision:

> But you grad– you gradually work up. He said, once they employ you for six months and then they see– they feel motivated if you're going to work, they'll send you back to college and pay you– and, you know, pay your fee for coming here.

One of Mr. Parker's goals for Banking and Finance was to give students confidence. In this regard, he tried to make Alma a role model for the class, not only to help the other students, but also to give her more confidence. Here is how he explains it:

Mr. Parker: See, I'm using Alma as my model.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Parker: And so, I'm, I'm shaping Alma. I'm putting a lot of time in. See, Alma is all right, it's just a little confidence, but that's my model. Alma is my model. If I can use Alma as my model, then I can shape LaReisha and the rest of them.

Part way through Mr. Parker's course, Alma appeared to be gaining confidence as can be seen from how she talks about herself: "I think I can master it, whatever it is. . . . I'm dependable, I'm motivated, I'm ready to work . . . I'm determined . . . Sure we can make it, I believe we can make it. . . ."

But despite being hand-picked as a success story, Alma failed the proof-operator test, having difficulty with some particularly tricky word problems. This upset her teacher, who felt it might destroy Alma's new and still fragile confidence:

I know she can do the work. I know she can do the work and Alma has had a lot of failure and that's what bothers me. God damn it, I can't have her to continue to fail. She's got to have some success. You know what I mean?

(. . .)

But I haven't given up. I'm gonna get Alma a job, one way or the other. Somewhere along the line, I'm gonna get Alma a god damn job. I don't know how I'm gonna do it, but I'm gonna get it, but I'm just talking about, now I do this–, it's probably wrong, I don't know if it's right, but I'm gonna do it. I do this because I want to do this. I'm doing what I want to do. I'm doing what I know will work and I know I'm gonna hit upon the right person. . .

Alma took the test again, after going over a sample test and practicing similar problems. This time she passed. But it was not the practice alone that helped her. She had expediently memorized the answers to the problems that had caused difficulty the first time. And, finally, she was hired by the bank as a proof-operator.

Six months later Alma was fired because she could not meet the required production speed. In a follow-up interview, I learned that Alma was left-handed while all the proof-operating machines in the bank are made for right-handed workers. For six months she had punched the ten-key board with one index finger and, not surprisingly, was not able to keep up with her right-handed peers. Mr. Parker was unaware that the bank had only

right-handed machines, and also he had not noticed that Alma was left-handed, since his machines accommodate both right and left-handed students.

In a follow-up interview, Alma compared proof-operating to assembly line work where things are "mostly assembled with right-hand people [because] . . . most people, most people are right-handed." And she makes the point about left-handed people that "we just born like that." Throughout this follow-up interview, which included Mr. Parker, Alma repeatedly states that she could do all the work required of a proof-operator, albeit not in the time limits set by the bank. Mr. Parker takes equal pride with Alma that she had mastered the machine:

> Alma: And I was doing the work.
>
> Mr. Parker: And you was doing the work.
>
> Alma: I had no problem opening the machine and closing the machine. I was doing that work, (not) fast enough *[laughs]*.
>
> Mr. Parker: You closed that machine?
>
> Alma: Sure!
>
> Mr. Parker: Changed the ribbon on that machine?
>
> Alma: You better believe it!
>
> Mr. Parker: See, that, that's all–
>
> Alma: –And clean the camera off every day.
>
> Mr. Parker: That's right. And that's–
>
> Alma: –And clean it up, clean the whole machine off. Once a week, take the whole machine apart–
>
> Mr. Parker: –that's right, take it apart.
>
> Alma: –and clean it up, clean the whole machine off. Once a week, take the whole machine apart–
>
> Mr. Parker: –that's right, take it apart.
>
> Alma: –and clean it up.
>
> Mr. Parker: And that's all I wanted to instill in my students, confidence. Hell, if she can do it, I can do it, too.

After having worked at the bank, Alma believed that the test which had almost prevented her from getting the job in the first place was unrelated to the work she had been doing:

> Interviewer: You know, you think that, you remember the test, do you know that test–
>
> Alma: –yes–
>
> Interviewer: Was that a good test for–
>
> Alma: –It didn't have anything to do with that bank. It had nothing to do with the machine what was there–
>
> Interviewer: –Did it have nothing, did it have anything–
>
> Alma: –**No**!–
>
> Interviewer: –to do with the job at all?
>
> Alma: NO!
>
> Interviewer: Isn't that interesting.
>
> Alma: None **what-so-ever**.

Even after being kept out of this position by a test which she now believed had nothing to do with the job, and being asked to resign only because she was left-handed, Alma still hoped to work in a bank one day. Mr. Parker encouraged her to think this is possible, while he also suggested the difficulties involved, given the fact that she lost her entry-level position:

> Interviewer: So what kind of job would you be looking for next? Uh, another one at a bank or would you do something else or–
>
> Alma: I don't know. I'll try bank again, I'm not sure, so I'll train with them. *[laughs]*
>
> Interviewer: Well, what advice would you have? *[to Mr. Parker]*
>
> Mr. Parker: Well, actually, depending on what's, what's available, uhm, see, what I probably could do for Alma is, is in look around, ask around in the bank for something other than a, than a proof. See, less she mention, this would ( ) ATM operators and these are the people who empty the ATM machines, automatic teller–
>
> Interviewer: Mmhmm.

Mr. Parker: Uh, the check reconcilement people, uhm, the statement person which she mentioned.

Interviewer: Mmhmm.

Mr. Parker: The problem with it is, is that a lot of these jobs are internal–

Interviewer: –Mmhmm–

Mr. Parker: –and so,–

Interviewer: –Yeah, OK, so, you can't get them unless you're already there.

Mr. Parker: Unless, see, I have to, I have to be on first name, first basis that's we have to give, see, that's why we have to go to the proof-center cause I need to get over and break bread with Mrs. Bork. See, I gotta get in good with Mrs. Bork.

(. . .)

Mr. Parker: –See, it's all politics–

Interviewer: –Yeah.

Mr. Parker: And if I can get on the good side of Mrs. Bork and say, "Look, you remember Alma? "Yes, I remember Alma." "I really need to get her a position other than a proof." See, but I gotta massage Mrs. Bork.

Despite her mishaps at the bank, Alma says that she "feels good" about her experience there because "you don't just pass the test and walk off the job and don't show up. You try, you know, you try." She is now on government assistance and at home with her children.

LaReisha: "It's not about what you can do, it's about who you know."

LaReisha is in her mid-thirties and, like many of the other women, unmarried. She has two boys, aged five and thirteen. She was born and raised in the Bay Area. Although she says she liked school, she did not get a high school diploma: "I liked going to school, but then some days I guess I was just being-, wanted to be with the crowd, to see what the crowd was doing. It paid off and see I'm doing nothing." Later she got a part-time job and went to Gateway College, but she could not get financial aid because she was still living at home and her parents earned too much for her to qualify. LaReisha began her work at Gateway College by taking courses in welding. She has also been through a basic

reading and writing course designed to promote academic literacy and aid in transferring to a four-year college. After this she took Cosmetology, and then enrolled in Banking and Finance. In all, she says she has completed over one-hundred units at Gateway College. Yet, she has not completed a degree and has only a Banking and Finance certificate. LaReisha has worked at the now defunct DelMonte canning plant in Oakland where she worked as a janitor, worked in quality control, and ran a peach belt. She was earning $9.35 an hour when the factory closed. She is interested in getting similar work at General Foods. She says she will do anything as long as it pays, but she has not worked in either of her trained vocations—welding or cosmetology.

While attending Gateway College, LaReisha learned that through various AFDC and job-training programs, she could receive money for attending vocational courses. Her welding course was funded by the CETA program. As she puts it, "I went through CETA, cause CETA was giving me money." And her current schooling is supported by AFDC programs: "Oh now, just because I'm on, uh, AFDC, OK, and, um, you know, since I'm on AFDC they, they allow you, I forgot the grant and, um, I'm getting financial aid, and you know, they help, they're help paying for it and everything."

When she enrolled in Banking, she was already enrolled in Cosmetology, another vocational program. Financial aid would not let her stay in both classes. Mr. Parker explained this to us:

> Financial aid will not pay for two vocations, yeah that's it. That's a–, that's a hook. If you–if you start in cosmetology and you're on financial aid, you have to stay with that program until you finish it, I think. And they will not pay for you coming into Banking and Finance because that's another vocation, you follow what I'm saying?

LaReisha had to learn to negotiate these rules on her own, however, and, as a result, she holds a rather low opinion of the financial aid advisors at Gateway College: "They ain't boo-boo, they ain't nothing. . . . I had to help myself."

Unlike Jackie and Alma, LaReisha did not enroll in Banking and Finance to get a job. Rather, she says she wanted to "try and experience this banking." She explains that:

> I'm kind of confused on what I really want to do. . . . I want to get a taste of it and the only way to get a taste of it is to go to school.
>
> (. . .)

Yeah, so it's like I'm just exploring, exploring,

(. . .)

It's basically, I'm confused or I haven't matured enough to understand where I want to be at. . . . I haven't matured in that field yet in basically what I want to do. . . . So I decided what I'm going to have to touch here–, touch base here, touch base there, find out what I really want to do. . . .

Early in the course, Mr. Parker set his sights on changing LaReisha. He wanted to socialize her into the more mild-mannered working person that he believes the bank would find more palatable, and he also appeared to recognize that she did not buy into the system and values he promoted:

Mr. Parker: No, no, she's not ready yet. No I haven't,– she's rough around the edge. I haven't– I haven't– uh got LaReisha where I want to.

(. . .)

She's rough around the edges because she's had a lot of things happened to her. She's still got, she's still got, LaReisha has a little meanness in her, if you want to put it. She–, she's still kinda angry with society, kinda thing. I gotta– I gotta shape her up. I gotta mellow her out.

(. . .)

I gotta change her demeanor, I gotta change her talk, I gotta change her attitude. . . . I gotta stroke her, then I gotta knock her down. . . .

(. . .)

She's, she's ready . . . but she's not ready mentally . . . she's still angry. She–, her boiling point is still too high. She'll get angry . . . she'll tell you where to go in a minute . . . and I got to get rid of that, see . . . I got to get those chips off her shoulder.

Mr. Parker also wanted to change LaReisha's thinking about and behavior with men. He seemed to fear that any woman in his program, if she were in a relationship with a man, would likely be ill-treated and become pregnant unless she was ever vigilant:

Mr. Parker: Well that's–, what kind of god damn woman, excuse me Glynda, I'm sorry *(laughter)*, but I get so angry–

Interviewer: –yeah–

Mr. Parker: –because, you know, these are, these are bright people, they are intelligent, they . . . LaReisha is a nice young lady, Karessa is a nice young lady, right? So I'm saying . . . wake up, damn it! Stop being

abused by these god damn men! All they want is to lay you down on the couch. Anybody can do that. You know what I mean? So, but I'm the only one saying that *[laughs]* you know, and I'm only saying that to a–, what's there. The rest of these people are not saying that. To give these, these individuals hope, and to say you don't have to do that. There's more to life than that and more important, you're gonna have somebody that come by that become emotionally involved, get involved, and then, you're pregnant–

(. . .)

But I can't, see, see, I can't do that *[talk to the women in his program directly about birth control]* and I don't do that because I'm not in–, the only time I do that where I know I'm safe, when I say, I say if I have another female with me to talk to–. The nurse up there is the one who sent me the prophylactics now, but I don't do that, you know, I said, no I'm not gonna get involved with this shit *[laughs]*, you know, cause that's all I need, uh, for something like that. So, on a, on a, on another, on another, on another level, uh, I, I kinda talk to people, to them. Like I got LaReisha, LaReisha's gonna be all right, see, cause I can talk with LaReisha. I can talk to her.

Interviewer: She seemed, yeah, she's really something, LaReisha is.

Mr. Parker: See, LaReisha's got it together.

Interviewer: She does, doesn't she?

Mr. Parker: Yeah. LaReisha's got it together. They're not gonna get to her no more *[laughs]*. No, cause I told her, you know, let him go, you know what he wants and that's all he wants and he's already given you one. ( ) Even if it don't feel good, wear a boot, you know, I can talk to LaReisha like that–
Interviewer: –yeah, yeah–

Mr. Parker: –she said "you got it" *[laughs]* you know, she's, "you got it"–

Interviewer: –yeah, yeah–

Mr. Parker: –I say, you know, if you don't have any, I got some, just don't take no chances. It's too big of a chance to take. You can't afford to take anymore chances. Well, LaReisha's grown, she's mature–

Mr. Parker and LaReisha do agree on one thing, however: LaReisha does not plan to have any more children. But she does not plan to marry, either. She has her own views on that subject:

Marriage ain't nothing to me. . . . What is marriage? A piece of paper?

(. . .)

> You know, it, it's, it's like a pain. I have these two children . . . I have to provide for and then see, like a husband, he just another addition that I got to cook, and he want me to cook his food.
>
> (. . .)
>
> It seem like to me, if he's gonna take care of me, he's gonna put limitations on my life. . . . And I don't want that. I want to be able to go and do as I please, because I make my money. . . .

Not withstanding the differences between her and her teacher, LaReisha is good at banking and finance. She balances the first time the class does simulated telling; she passes the proof-operator tests for both Bank of the Pacific and Western Bank; she interviews for a job as proof-operator; and she is offered a job. After LaReisha passes the tests and gets a job offer, Mr. Parker assumes his attempts to socialize her have succeeded. He also assumes that LaReisha has internalized his notions of success, and he takes credit for this:

> Interviewer: Now LaReisha got a job at Bank of the Pacific, too, right? Is she gonna take it?
>
> Mr. Parker: Mmhmm, oh yes, LaReisha can't wait. –I gave LaReisha a reason to be alive, to be a person. I reassured her that she, I said, "LaReisha, you, you the best I got. You know, I say that to all of them. But you, you, you, you the–, I mean you got everything that one needs. Hell, you can go anywhere you want to. Don't ever let anybody tell you you can't do something. . . ."

But LaReisha does not take the job at the bank. She first says she declined because of the unusual hours and transportation problems. Later she says it is because her boyfriend told her not to take it.

> Interviewer: How'd you know what it was going to be like?
>
> LaReisha: Because my boyfriend told me. He said he wasn't going to be resp–, he told me he don't feel like be coming across there having to pick me up because he know'd it was going to be a hassle. Cuz he knew that the BART stops at twelve, he thought it was twelve. And he said he didn't think it was a good idea because he used to party over there, then he said he don't think it would be a good idea because it'd be too much of a hassle and he'd have to come and plus he have to work. . . . So he said he preferred for me not to do it.

Mr. Parker has his own theory of how LaReisha can afford to turn down the proof job. "LaReisha's working the system. She's still at Gateway College." He says that she will keep receiving public assistance as long as she is enrolled in school. She has returned

to cosmetology, and he says she can make ends meet that way, and probably will continue, until the money runs out. He says she also has a 'sugar daddy' subsidizing her needs. "She's not hurting," Mr. Parker concludes.

A year after most of her classmates had taken and lost jobs at Bank of the Pacific, LaReisha talked about why she thought it was smarter for her to stay in school and receive governmental subsidies than to take a job at the bank. She presents a critique of the job market that provides an alternative way of viewing the system than Mr. Parker and the bank represent to the class:

> LaReisha: Tellers don't say that they make any money. . . . I don't know how much they make, but you know what gets me is this, these job markets, they, you, it seems like everything is all backwards. OK, like working at McDonald's. You see how much work– have you been to McDonald's?
>
> Interviewer: Yeah.
>
> LaReisha: You see how much work those cashiers or–, they do?. . . For a little bit of nothing and then people that making money, oh, they sit on their butt all day, you know what I'm saying? . . . I mean they ought to give them something. . . . Just, I mean if you think about it, like teller. Teller seems like it's a hard job to do, but I don't know how much it pay . . . six or seven dollars.
>
> (. . .)
>
> Another thing with the job market. It's all about who you know. . . . It's not about what you can do, it's about who you know.

Currently LaReisha has two jobs and is helping friends at Gateway College to find employment, too. She works for the local public transportation system as a bus driver and at an Avis rental car agency as a driver, a "mobile," and a "rover." The latter is supplementary work; she uses it to pay for luxury items such as a fur coat. To date, LaReisha has not taken a job at a bank.

Vivian: "I'm very inquisitive about everything."

Like LaReisha, Vivian did not enroll in Banking and Finance necessarily to get a job, but she was not "working the system" either. Her purpose for being in the program was to learn all about banking—as opposed to becoming a banker.

Vivian, like Alma, was among the older students in the class, enrolling in community college now that her son, aged thirteen, was in school. She had held few jobs in recent years and had instead devoted herself to raising her son. In high school, she had worked at her school as a switchboard operator. While her son was growing, she volunteered to work at church banquets. Since 1986, she has worked as a waitress at a barbecue stand. She describes her decision to enroll in the Banking and Finance program this way: "You know, I have been really doin' general education, refreshing courses. Then I decided, well, I want to do something different, try something different, and then I—well, maybe banking will be for me." Because of dental surgery, Vivian did not start attending the program until three weeks into the semester. She was concerned at first that she would not be able to catch up with the other students, but she soon did, becoming an active member of the class.

Vivian seemed to believe the purpose of education was personal fulfillment, not getting a job—an unusual attitude among those we studied in this vocational program. Here she talks about Mr. Parker's class:

> Banking? Yes I feel, OK, if I really wanted to go out and get a job in banking, it prepared me to get a job. But my goal is to learn as much as I can about banking. You see, I know there are different avenues in banking. OK, you have teller, you have switchboard operators, you have ATM tellers. You have real estate, stocks, and bonds. So there are all the different kinds of avenues to banks. . . . And I want to learn as much as I can. I don't want to do just one particular thing. If I have to, I really would like to say, well, I have experience doing a variety of different things, not only as a teller doing transaction work, but I would like to know about loans, real estate loans. Because that's a field that eventually whenever I do get into a position to buy me a home or whatever, or to have a purchase, I would like to know how would I go about purchasing this land. And how much interest I would have to pay. So if I decided to go to the bank, I would have some knowledge of how to go about it.

Her interest in the various aspects of banking came across in class, as well. When a guest speaker came to talk about financial planning, she asked several questions about stocks and bonds during class, then wanted to talk with the speaker during break about personal investments.

Vivian said one reason she wanted to learn all of the various aspects of banking was because she tends to get bored by repetition:

> I like the teller part . . . because there's so many different transactions that you can do, and see that's the thing that really keeps me motivated– is learning how to do the different transactions with money and stuff.
>
> (. . .)
>
> Just sittin' down doin' one job really couldn't, at times for me, really could become very boring. So I like to learn how to do this one here, these here, and here. I like to be, have, versatility. And then that way when I feel better, I'm able to expand myself and learn this and this. I'm more motivated.

Her interest in the educational as opposed to vocational aspect of this program was also evident in her desire to complete a degree program in banking. She talked to us about the classes she would need to fulfill that ambition: "I'll just have to go and see a counselor to find out which [math] course is really equivalent to banking. Because I have often specified not just only for a certificate but what is required for me to get an A.A. degree in banking."

Vivian's "inquisitive" nature, as she called it, went beyond her desire to learn all about banking, to include other subjects as well. She said she had been taking "a variety (of) general courses" at Gateway College prior to enrolling in banking. And she expressed an interest in taking other classes such as computer courses in the future, talking about other courses much as she talked about banking in terms of the "variety" which the subjects had to offer: "And that's another thing I want to do, too, is get into more computer classes. . . . There are a lot of different things a person can do on a computer. You know, you have all kinds of data sheets that can do, word processing sheets." Finally, the way she described her reading reflects her varied interests:

> I really like a lot of culture books. You know, I like poetry. I like anything, you know, with, that have to do with history cause I'm inquisitive. You know, I'm the one that picks up a book and if I start readin' in it and if it seems interesting to me I will continue to read to the end of the book, you know. . . . I like literacy. You know, and I like readin' about different things that's goin' on in the world. You know, and I'm very inquisitive about everything. It's like I'm flexible with everything. It's the book that you somehow pick up that seems interesting to me, that catch my attention, then yes I will read it. You know, I have several books on all different kinds of things.

I do not think, though, that it was simply Vivian's attitude toward education that seemed to keep her from wanting a job at the bank—it was also her attitude toward herself.

Throughout the course she seemed nervous and uncertain of her abilities. As an older re-entry woman, she seemed acutely aware that the gap in her work experience (1973-1986) was a long one, and she repeatedly asked how she should explain it to potential employers:

> Vivian: So then I was wondering, well I've been out of high school what since '73? What is this '83, '89?
>
> Interviewer: Mmhhmm.
>
> Vivian: Uh, fifteen to sixteen years and I was wonderin' should I go back that far even though some applications said no? Do you see what I'm sayin'?
>
> Interviewer: Yeah.
>
> Vivian: So I was wondering if that would be a good idea? Um, do you just put (that) on a résumé.

Vivian also had some worries about her speed and abilities on the ten-key machine:

> Yeah, like doin' the ten key. I can do the work, but I'm more or less accuracy than speed. . . . And uh, with speed it seems like when it's (timed) thing, it makes me nervous. But accuracy, I'm better with the accuracy than with speed. You know because I can do it in with less mistakes but it seems when I'm nervous it's a, it just gets haywire.
>
> (. . .)
>
> You know, mostly everything in this class so far have not been a problem for me, you know. Because even with my proof machine, you know, I can somewhat do that but I'm into accur–, accuracy, you know . . . than, uh, speed. So I figure gradually, you know, it'll take its course. You know, I can be able to do it with speed, you know, later on. Cause right now it's building up slowly but surely, and I'm–, you know, I have always been the type—some people can do it real fast and uh really don't make too many mistakes. And then you got those that have to build their way up to it. And that's the way I am.

Later in the same interview, Vivian expressed similar concerns about speed and accuracy when, after she said she had learned carpentry, she was asked if she had ever considered working as a carpenter:

> Yes. I sure have. But you see, the thing in doing carpentry work, is you have to really be able to do that work in a certain amount of time. . . . It's fun to do. OK, if you are doing it for yourself, you know, because you can set your own pace, if you are doing it for your own self. But when you are doing it for other people, you really have to be good at it to be able to finish the work at a certain deadline. I do it for myself because I like doing it and I

> can do it at my own pace suitable for me. . . . You see with me, I like more or less doing it for myself.

Mr. Parker seemed aware of Vivian's nervousness, calling it a lack of confidence. He felt she had the speed and ability necessary to fill a proof-operator's position immediately. But Vivian was sufficiently worried about her speed that she vetoed any suggestion of an immediate bank job:

> Interviewer: If Mr. Parker found you a proof-operator job, would you take it?
>
> Vivian: To be perfectly honest? At this point I wouldn't take it right now because I know the speed that they will have to do. You know, but later on, you know, after I feel that I have built up my speed with accuracy, I would do it.

At the end of the semester, Vivian did not take the proof-operator's test, and she did not interview with Mrs. Lavelle from Bank of the Pacific. Instead, she stayed on in Mr. Parker's class for a second semester, working informally as his teacher's aide. Even after this second semester in his class, she did not attempt to get a position at the bank.

Koyendi: "I was, like, 'man, what is this?'"

Koyendi, an African American, was eighteen-years old and just out of high school when he enrolled in Mr. Parker's Banking and Finance program. He had been in California for only three years, moving with his family from suburban Chicago in time to begin his sophomore year in Oakland. His mother, who is single, decided to move to California upon the death of her mother, Koyendi's grandmother. Since she has been in California, however, she has been unable to find work and is on public assistance. Koyendi, the oldest of eight siblings, described himself in our initial interview as being "totally dependent" in terms of finances on his mother.

From the outset, it was clear that Koyendi did not plan to make a career of his work at the bank, although he took Mr. Parker's class to get a job. His long-term career goal was to become a musician, a singer/songwriter. He explained that he learned about the Banking and Finance class through his girlfriend's cousin and brother: "They were here, so they told me about it and they said you get in and he might—he line you up with a job." He says he took this class because a job is "what I need at the moment." At different times

he has said he wanted to work at the bank to earn money to go to school or to "work for a while and save up enough to go back to Chicago."

Koyendi had not been happy since he moved away from Chicago. He described the difference between his life in Chicago and Oakland this way: "Oakland is like the South side of Chicago . . . you know, run down. I mean, see that's depressing. It's like living on the South side, and you can't get out. You know what I'm saying?" Having lived in suburban North Chicago, he clearly considers inner city schools and Oakland itself less desirable than Chicago, concluding, "I'm real sorry, I just want to go home."

He also found his high school experience very different in California than in Illinois. In California "like, they just give you a book, give you an assignment and a page number and that's it, you're on your own," but in Chicago, "you learned easier the way it was presented and set up for you." Also in Chicago he was allowed to choose his classes, including music classes, but in Oakland he says he was told "this is what you need and this is what you're getting." His two electives in Oakland were art and ROTC. No music. His reputation as a singer, however, won him the opportunity to try out with the school's a cappella chorus. And despite the fact that he had not been in the regular school chorus and had not taken any music classes, he earned a place in this elite choral group.

Koyendi had had only one job prior to enrolling in Banking and Finance. Like many other students in this class, he had worked at McDonald's, and like them, he was less than enchanted with the job. Koyendi ridiculed those who thought they could make a career of working at McDonald's, and he appeared to think, as we will see later, that the bank was not a likely place for such aspirations either:

> Koyendi: . . . And then the people that was there, they was like all into it and serious and I was the only one, like, "man, what is this?"
>
> Interviewer: *[laughs]* They were planning to make a career out of working at McDonald's?
>
> Koyendi: Yeah, they was like, they was looking to become manager and get–, like at the time ( ) gets $3.35 there, then you become manager you get like six dollars, five dollars an hour–
>
> Interviewer: –yeah, yeah–
>
> Koyendi: So they was like–, that was a big thrill to become manager.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Koyendi: So like, I didn't want to work ( ). It was like, they wanted you to perform more than what they was paying you for. You know, I was getting paid $3.35 an hour. They wanted me to cook, mop, and go downstairs and unload the truck and all this. I mean, these boxes were heavy, and then like, if you get the big racks of buns off the truck, and if you stack them wrong or something the buns on top will smash the ones on the bottom, then they say they're gonna take it out of my check. Well, at the time, at the time I was only getting like thirty-five dollars every two weeks. What are they gonna take out of my check *[laughs]*. I wouldn't have any more check, so I finally just got frustrated with it, and so I quit.

Mr. Parker attempted to groom Koyendi for his position in the bank, much as he did the women we have presented thus far. In accordance with current styles, Koyendi had a small braid in his hair that he had dyed orange. He also wore an earring. Mr. Parker told Koyendi that the braid had to be cut off, the hair dyed back to its natural color, and the earring removed if he hoped to get a job. He even brought Koyendi some of his son's clothing to wear to the bank interview. Koyendi seemed grateful for the help from Mr. Parker, making all the suggested changes before the interview. And Mr. Parker was pleased with his handiwork:

. . . You remember I told you I'm molding him. I'm working on him. I brought him some clothes the other day. Tie, shirt, so, "I'm, I'm gonna put you in the corporate world. When you walk out, man, people's gonna snap their heads, say look at him. . . ." Now, Koyendi's a grown man. He doesn't have to do that if he didn't want to. Koyendi believes that what I'm saying is true and I'll have to follow up.

But Mr. Parker worried about the influences that could lead Koyendi astray once he was no longer enrolled in Banking and Finance:

Mr. Parker: It's just that their friends haven't been able to come with them and that's the thing that I told you about Koyendi. How strong he is. Can he hold out? See, he's already dyed his hair, see, I'm changing. . . . How much of that can I pump in him, to keep him from deviance, 'cause those guys out there don't want to see Koyendi do that 'cause they're losing him out of the group. You follow me?

Interviewer: Where–, what will be–, he can start as proof-operator?

Mr. Parker: As proof-operator.

Interviewer: What, what do you think will, what do you think will become of him?

Mr. Parker: Hard to say. Because now, I, I, I don't–, I'm gonna lose him on a dail– on a daily basis. So now, the forces out there is what he's gonna have to fight against, and the forces I'm talking about, when he get his first paycheck, and he run up against the other brothers. Say, hey, man, let's go over near ( ). I know a couple of chicks 'round the corner–

Interviewer: –Yeah–

Mr. Parker: –the guy got some money in his pocket now, so they stop by the closest liquor store, get a six pack and two carton of cigarettes, and these girls just–

Interviewer: –Yeah.

Mr. Parker: And so here's a guy that hasn't valued the corporation yet, over uh, ( ) over pleasure–

Interviewer: –yeah–

Mr. Parker: –You follow what I'm saying?

Interviewer: So he's, he's in a little precarious spot right–

Mr. Parker: –He's in a very precarious spot 'cause they waiting on him. They waiting on him.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Parker: Shit, they are waiting on him.

Interviewer: There–, there's nothing you can do?

Mr. Parker: N–No. There's nothing I can do 'cause once I turn him loose, you know, he's gone. He, he's out of my, he's out of under my wings and I–, the worst part about that, I don't even know the environment that he's in–

Interviewer: –Mmmhmm.

Mr. Parker: I know it's not a good one, 'cause I know where he lives. You know, but, he– he's gone. I–, he's gone. *[laughs]* It's nothing I can do about it, in a sense.

Mr. Parker realized that some of the money Koyendi made at the bank would have to go to help support his mother and siblings, so he also worried about the ultimate effect of that responsibility:

Mr. Parker: . . . so you don't know, you don't know what kind of, you don't know what kind of pressure he's gonna be under from his family, his

mom, his other relatives, and so forth. And that's enough to drive him off on the deep end to start with.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Parker: You know, what I mean by that, when he does get the check, check, how many different ways he gotta distribute it?

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Mr. Parker: You, you follow what I mean?

Interviewer: Yes, uh–huh.

Mr. Parker: And, and on the same time, you said, wait a minute, you know, what am I gonna get out of this?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Parker: Uh, decision. Making a decision. And that's what I'm trying to do in this little short time is say hey, wait a minute, you gotta make some decision here. And that decision is you can't lay there when it's time to go to work. Uh, do something for yourself, you know, ( ) gonna be there, but go to work, see–

Interviewer: –yeah–

Mr. Parker: –so you can go back. You follow what I'm saying?

But Koyendi kept this job at the bank much longer than most of the other students in his cohort. Though I've been unable to speak with Koyendi myself since he started working, I've learned from follow-up interviews with other students placed at the same proof-center that Koyendi remained there, doing fine, for over a year. In September, six months after he was hired, Jackie reported that Koyendi was still at the bank, and going to school part-time at the local state university. Alma reported, after seven months, that Koyendi was still at the bank. In March of this year, eleven months after he had started at the bank, yet another student from Mr. Parker's class reported that Koyendi was one of the few students left at the bank from Mr. Parker's class. And Mr. Parker told me that he had recently seen Koyendi, with his ponytail grown back:

Mr. Parker: But they allow him to do that and fits right into him, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, he probably cut it to get the job.

Mr. Parker: Right. Just to get the job, and now, he's, he's exactly the way he should be and he's very happy there.

I am not sure how happy Koyendi is to be at the proof-center, for he had to cancel a recent follow-up interview, he said, in order to arrive on time for a job interview at a different firm. Most recently, I learned from Mr. Parker, who had heard through the grapevine, that Koyendi was no longer with the bank. However, I do not know why he left or if he left on his own or was let go. What is clear is that this student was able to stick it out much longer than most, to succeed at being a proof-operator while he went to school and/or looked for other work.

Chen: "Why I work in a bank? . . . That's hard question."

Like Koyendi, Chen went through Mr. Parker's Banking and Finance course and not only got a position in the bank, but also kept the job for a significant period of time. To my knowledge, he is still working at the bank. Also like Koyendi, Chen was interested in work at the bank not as an entry-level position from which he would launch a career in banking, but as a way to gain some knowledge useful to a student interested in a career in business, and also as a way to support his attendance at the local state university.

Chen lives in Oakland with his parents and younger brother. He had graduated from an Oakland high school in 1985, specializing in electronics, and then had attended a community college where he took eleven units of computer courses and learned to use IBM personal computers. He was twenty-one at the time he entered Gateway College and Mr. Parker's program. He told us that he planned to take business accounting and maybe history at Gateway College, eventually transferring to a four-year university for a B.A. Previously he had worked as a clerk for the local school district and in a goldfish store. When asked why he wanted to work in a bank, he responded that banks give "good benefits" (which, by the way, was one of the answers Mr. Parker primed his students to give during their interviews—despite the fact that most proof-operators are part-timers and, thus, get no benefits). Although Chen thought of his work at the bank only as a way to support his educational goals, he also hoped to work his way up at least to the position of teller while he was there.

In an interview with Mr. Parker nine months after Chen was hired by the bank, I learned that Chen was not only succeeding as a proof-operator, but was excelling. He earned bonuses because of his speed and accuracy:

> My Chinese student, Chen, came in at the beginning of the semester and he told me he had worked fifty-one hours. They get time-and-a-half over

forty. See? So, hell, Chen had a pocket full of money (laughs) you know, my little Chinese student. And he says, "Oh, Mr. Parker, I like this, this is nice," (laughs) you know. I says, " What are you gonna do next?" I mean that's not–and I introduced Chen to the class. This is Chen. Tell 'em Chen, what's going on. And Chen is now doing fourteen hundred items per hour and, and, and they only ask for twelve. He says, hell, I do fourteen hundred and I'll walk around and talk to people, on the proof-machine, see? And they pay you an incentive, see. He get the–, that's the reason he came by. They gave him a day off with pay, uh, and they, they give you some sort of little bonus, you know, after you, you master this, so on and so forth.

Although Chen was obviously very successful at proof-operating, he had not moved to tellering, a position in which he had shown interest while in Banking and Finance. This probably had to do with language. When Chen was interviewed, he often hesitated and sometimes failed to answer questions, though I knew he was not the type of student to challenge me, directly or indirectly. The difficulty seemed to be with English—either understanding my questions or finding the words and phrases to answer them. Early on in the first interview he even said, as he hesitated, "I don't know how to say it." Here is an excerpt from an interview with Chen to illustrate this phenomenon:

Interviewer: So do you like being a proof-operator?

Chen: Well, it's um *[laughs]* well I think so because those uh . . . it was, mmm hmm hmm, I don't know how to say it. Mmm, yep.

(. . .)

Interviewer: What made you decide to go into banking?

Chen: What made you. . . ?

Interviewer: *[laughs]*

Chen: ( ) I have to think about.

Interviewer: Yeah, you're the one person, you know when you, um, that first day when you wrote that little blurb about yourself, you're the only person who said that you thought that banking was good for your future.

Chen: *[laughs]*

Interviewer: I was wondering, especially after you ( ). What, what were you thinking when you went to the other community college? What kind of job you wanted to get.

Chen: Um, first thing, I went to Douglas, I tried to my, get my major in computer science.
Interviewer: Uh huh

Chen: And then I changed my mind.

Interviewer: How come?

Chen: *[laughs]* How come?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Chen: I don't know, I just changed my mind. Go back to business.

(. . .)

Interviewer: What is it about a bank that you like working there?

Chen: Hmm?

Interviewer: Why do you like working at a bank?

Chen: Why?

Interviewer: Yeah. You know that's, last Wednesday I was talking to a couple people

Chen: Mmhmm.

Interviewer: From Bank of the Pacific, Western Bank and they were tellin' me what kind of questions they ask when they interview, and one of the main ones was "Why do you wanna work in a bank?" So.

Chen: How would you answer?

Interviewer: Yeah, how would you answer, how would you answer that?

Chen: Why I work in a bank? *[laughs]*

Interviewer: Mmhmm.

Chen: *[laughs]* Well, um, because I can challenged, I can get challenged, you know, and then um make, well *[laughs, long pause]*. That's hard question.

The repeating of questions, the long pauses, the nervous laughter, and the short answers in this interview transcript, all suggest a student who is having difficulty producing English. His behavior in class also suggested that he was uncomfortable speaking English, since he chose to sit in one of the back corners of the room and rarely

spoke up in front of the class. Finally, an essay Chen wrote on the first day of class revealed his rudimentary English writing skills. We reproduce in typed form below the short paragraph with its original spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. On the original there were also numerous cross-outs and scribbles.

> My name is Chen. I gruated from STAFFORD HIGH SCHOOL. I got Depolma from Staford HIGH SCHOOL. My skill I.B.M. BASIC personal computer. I get in Banking class about few month. Because I realy interesing in Banking. I think the Best way in my futrue.

Mrs. Lavelle helps us understand how an employee like Chen, who has difficulty producing oral and written English, could be such a successful proof-operator. She also suggests, however, that such an employee might have difficulty moving into customer service positions:

> Mrs. Lavelle: I guess this was last year; we hired some students from here that, uh, their language, even though, I should say–, uh, their communication skills, verbal communication skills were poor, but they passed the test.
>
> Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.
>
> Mrs. Lavelle: And they're working.
>
> Interviewer: Ahh [*laughter*]. So, so–
>
> Mrs. Lavelle: –see, as a proof-operator, the verbal of it isn't that important, as long as they can understand, and they can read.
>
> Interviewer: So the speaking didn't matter there?
>
> Mrs. Lavelle: No, but as, see, but, OK, in order for them to–, uh, let's say, move into other areas, then they should stay in school, work on their, uh, you know, uh, communication skills, the verbal part of it, and, uh, then they can move on because, see, a lot of our jobs do require using the telephone.
>
> Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, OK, all right, so–, yeah, so you'd be expecting to see some development in those– those people.
>
> Mrs. Lavelle: Right, and the–, and, and, and, uh, most of them do.
>
> Interviewer: Mmhmm, mmhmm.
>
> Mrs. Lavelle: You know, they end up mastering the Eng– the English language.

As Mrs. Lavelle talked more about other proof-operators, it became apparent that not talking too much was in fact an asset in getting this job. She told me about a student who was too "disruptive," asking lots of questions during the proof test and the interview. This student was not hired, despite his dexterity. Mr. Parker certainly recognized the usefulness of keeping quiet. He once commented,

> I'm trying to prepare them through, what I call, human relations. One must be able to get along with other people. Gotta bend. This is a give and take society that we live in. You catch more flies with sugar than you do with salt. . . . I don't agree with it. I think it's lousy. It was there when I was there. I made it through. It was tough. You keep your mouth shut and your eyes and ears open *[laughs]*. Somebody, somebody give you a helping hand, grab it, don't throw it away.

Predictably, Chen's English language performance did not interfere with his job as a proof-operator, where interpersonal skills and customer service are not central. I do know, however, that Chen has not moved or been promoted to another job during his two years at the proof-center. This might be because of his English, or perhaps he has been content, as Mr. Parker believes, to improve his already quick proofing speed and collect his incentive pay while continuing to be a part-time student.

THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG SKILLS, SCHOOLING, AND WORK

The Skills Controversy Revisited

By now we have traveled a long way from the skills controversy—out of the popular literature on the economic consequences of illiteracy, away from scholarly debates on the nature of literacy and education—and into vocational school, the workplace, and people's lives. Let us now revisit the skills controversy by asking what this study of lived experience has to say about the relationship among skills, schooling, and work. Most strikingly, I found no simple, one-to-one correlation between, on the one hand, being skilled or able to accomplish work, and on the other, doing well in training, getting a job, or keeping it.

Let us recall that the Banking and Finance program had no entry requirements; some students like Jackie had apparently done all right in high school, but others like Alma still had difficulty with reading and writing, and others, recent immigrants from Asia, like

Chen, and Latin America, were self-conscious about speaking English, not to mention reading and writing it. Yet Mr. Parker liked to tell us that his students knew most of what they needed before they came into the program; all he had to do was give them some polishing. This polishing partly took the form of practice at telling, proofing, and the ten-key machine, but the emphasis in the program was more on socializing students than building up their bank knowledge or improving their machine calculation skills. Many classes consisted of good-humored admonitions about how to sit, behave, and talk in a corporation, or juicy, down and dirty stories about what it is like to work in the world of high finance—a workplace and a world that at least some students believed they were about to join. The program seemed, then, long on socialization and confidence-building and short on knowledge and skill-training in terms of both banking and literacy.

The short-term nature of the program and its lack of focus on skills and knowledge did not, however, seem to serve most students badly in terms of being able to get a job. In many ways, Mr. Parker was right; many students did only need his "polishing." Some passed Bank of the Pacific's employment-screening proof test the first time around, despite the fact that it required facility with the ten-key machine, visual discrimination, direction following, and problem solving, and all of these under time constraints. Others passed it on a second try, others with coaching, and at least one by cheating. All that separated students from Bank of the Pacific was an interview, which seemed more a formality, or perhaps, a charade, than anything else. Mrs. Lavelle chatted politely with the nervous potential employees who had passed the proof test, asking them why they would like to work at Bank of the Pacific, what their long-term career aspirations were, and whether they could work at night and were interested in part-time. Many students shined in these interviews, trying out approved explanations for spotty job histories and talking corporate talk in just the way Mr. Parker had modeled. Others spoke in monosyllables, very shyly and self-consciously. But Mrs. Lavelle hired people, not wholly on the basis of their performance in the interview, and not wholly on the basis of their test scores, but most often because Mr. Parker advised that they were "ready" or, more rarely, that they really needed a chance. Sometimes I saw his recommendation override an ailing test score or a too reticent or self-deprecating interview. It seemed that the proof test was just a means to eliminate people if the need arose, rather than an instrument useful for matching people's skills with possible jobs, and that Mr. Parker and Mrs. Lavelle both recognized this function and acted accordingly. Indeed, Mr. Parker referred to it as a "process of

elimination." It is noteworthy in this context to recall the perception of some workers that the proof test had little or nothing to do with the actual job.

The contradictions surrounding skills continued in the workplace. There I realized that the very thing that many African-American students seemed good at, and one of the things most stressed in the Banking and Finance program—that is, interpersonal skills such as would be required in an interview situation or in a sales-type position—were not required in the proof-center. It didn't matter much how you dressed or presented yourself so long as you got to work on time and were quick and accurate at your work and able, as Alma liked to point out, to keep your mouth shut. As for literacy, some reading was required in the training period, but most people managed it, even recent immigrants like Chen, by taking the manuals home and getting help from others. On the actual job, precious little conventional literacy was needed at all. People read and punched in numbers, and they checked off boxes on forms. The only skills needed on the job (besides a tolerance for stress) were those capabilities for operating the proof machine. Ironically, students did not get much practice in the Banking and Finance program on its one rusty old proof machine (although they did get to practice the ten-key calculator). Such practice may not be so crucial for most students, however, for by all the accounts that we have, those capabilities quickly become routine. I do not mean to downplay the skill required for "unskilled" work—Kusterer (1978) has demonstrated the considerable "working knowledge" that machine operators develop and depend upon. But I do mean to point out that the jobs that students from the Banking and Finance program most frequently got required little knowledge of banking and few social skills—in direct contrast to the emphasis in the program—nor did they require much reading or any writing, which runs counter to the basic skills literature and the widespread claims that American industries are suffering because workers lack advanced literacy skills and high tech competencies.

Finally, the most striking contradiction I uncovered was that being able to do the work of a proof-operator—the deployment of whatever knowledge and skills that this job requires—was not sufficient for staying employed. Put another way, among the group I studied, many of the skilled workers, those who were fast and accurate at proofing, lost their jobs right along with the very few workers who were less skilled, who were not sufficiently fast or accurate. In fact, there was an extremely high rate of turnover at the proof-center for students in Mr. Parker's program. And judging by the regularity with which local banks sent their representatives round to interview a new crop of applicants,

the same rate seems to apply to other centers and for other workers. (As this manuscript goes to press in the Fall of 1992, this situation seems to be changing. Managers and workers at several data centers have reported to us recently that proof-operators are holding on to their jobs much longer than has been customary because they cannot find any other work, given the country's poor economy. At the same time, the requirements for the jobs that do exist are being raised because companies can be very selective. And Mr. Parker reports low enrollment in his program for the first time in years, as word gets around that there are few jobs available in local banks.)

I have tried to demonstrate for this vocational program in Banking and Finance and for the job of proofing, that the current popular rhetoric which attempts to blame economic difficulties on unskilled labor and then attempts to remedy the problem with literacy programs and ever proliferating sets of workbooks and computer-aided instruction on basic skills, simply misses the mark. No, it misses the whole target. Something is curiously and deeply wrong here. People enter a training program which emphasizes skills that will not be used on the job, are given an employment test that requires skills that have questionable relevance to work, are hired despite doing poorly on the test and the interview, and lose their jobs even when they are competent at doing the work. The problem is much more complicated than a deficit in skills, and its solution is much more difficult than devising a new skills-building program or providing workplace literacy instruction.

Reproductive and Democratizing Forces: A Case Study

When I have reported this research to various audiences, I have noticed that it often elicits conflicting responses, surprisingly divergent interpretations and evaluations. On the one hand, here is a program, people will point out, serving a minority population, a population which does not get help elsewhere, which is often ignored and cast aside. The women in this program need to work, the argument goes; they need to pay their rent and take care of their children; they need some autonomy, some relief from their dependence on government assistance and exploitative men. They do not need further schooling at the moment; they do need jobs. A short-term program in Banking and Finance would thus seem to fit the bill. We have a caring instructor who helps his students through personal difficulties with recalcitrant landlords as well as the intricacies of opening and closing the

teller window, and of mastering the proof machine. We have a low-pressure, welcoming curriculum, which students can enter and leave at their need. We have hiring done right on campus, with local banks sending their representatives over to interview and test and set up appointments to come to work. And the students get, at least potentially, not just a temporary job, but the chance for advancement, a foot in the door of the corporate world. They get a job of a different kind—not burger turning—but something akin to high finance. They gain self-confidence, believing in themselves for the first time in a long time. And even if they do not work at the bank permanently, even if they do not turn out to be that rarity who moves to teller from proof, to loans from teller, the self-confidence they have developed will serve them well in future jobs. Sure, there are problems with the program. There are things that can be improved. But what we need to do is work on those problems—find a way, for example, to increase job retention and to impress upon students the uncompromisable necessity of arriving at work on time.

The other response starts out at the same place, but proceeds rapidly to a different destination. Again, here we have minority women who need to work, who need to be able to pay their rent and take care of their children, who need some autonomy, some relief from their dependence on government assistance and exploitative men. They end up at Mr. Parker's program in Banking and Finance because they have heard he can get them a job. They imagine jobs in a bank would give them some autonomy. The jobs would provide a "professional" environment, a place where a person can dress up, be respected, and have a little power. They imagine, too, jobs that will pay enough to support them and their children. They proceed through the program appreciatively, most of them genuinely thankful for the attention they have lacked for a long time, most wistfully hopeful about the future. When the banks interview and test, some students are put to work right away—especially those who seem, like their instructor, to buy into the notion that hard work and perseverance will get you your dream. But these new workers go not to a "professional" setting, but to a place their instructor has at times called an electronic sweatshop or a "regimented environment." This place is distant, requiring time and money for a commute. Its schedule is exactly what the women, especially those with children, cannot handle—late night hours when public transportation has stopped. They get low wages, insufficient for living above the poverty line, and no benefits. Is it any surprise, then, that at this workplace most of the women quickly fall by the way? Within six months, they continue their welfare dependence and stay at home with their children. They look back on their banking experience as a kind of visit to a foreign country, just a brief respite in another

world. Meanwhile, the community college vocational program continues to feed local banks new crops of hopefuls, and the banks continue to profit from a cheap labor pool. "Why attempt to improve the program?" the more cynical would ask. "It's already accomplishing its purpose."

These conflicting interpretations reflect ideological differences, and both are possible, I would argue, because there is some truth in each. Both capture a part of the whole, but fail to account for all the pieces. What I will try to do here is offer a more comprehensive explanation, one that subsumes both perspectives. In essence, by explaining how a vocational program can continually send students to jobs in banks that many quickly lose, I will provide a case study of the workings of reproductive and democratizing forces, to return to Carnoy and Levin's terms. Rather than focusing on one site where such dramas may be played out, such as the classroom or the community college or the workplace, I will attempt to show how people and structures at multiple levels interact to oppose, support, and, ultimately, as far as most of the students in this study are concerned, to sustain the status quo.

Over the last fifteen years there has, of course, been a great deal of research on the ways in which social inequalities are maintained through schooling (e.g., Apple, 1979; Bowles & Gintis, 1974; Giroux, 1983; McRobbie, 1978; Willis, 1977). However, I am uncomfortable with many accounts of reproduction, or the notion that schools reproduce the social relations needed to sustain our economic system. Some such accounts (see the reviews by Giroux, 1983, and Borman, 1991) seem overly deterministic, too rarely finding a role for human agency or complexity in human behavior and motive and too often offering schooling as a "black box" whose reproductive processes are unavailable for study (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1974). More recent theorizing explores the role of individual agency through resistance—students' attempts, for example, to reject the dominant culture and, therefore, school knowledge by refusing to cooperate in classrooms (see McLaren, 1986; Willis, 1977). More recently still, researchers interested in issues of gender and race have begun to call for and conduct studies which account for the differing experiences of women and minorities (Borman, 1991; Griffin, 1985; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Valli, 1986).

In the analysis presented below, rather than assuming reproduction or expecting examples of the same kinds of resistance that have been reported in the literature, I have

tried to take an interactive view of social formation, foregrounding, I hope, the complexity of the process. I have tried, following McCarthy and Apple (1988), to examine the lives of a group of students and their teacher in school and at work, and to demonstrate empirically the connections that I have seen between educational and work practices and gender, race, and class relations. The picture that emerges is not one of unopposed reproduction or of flagrant resistance. I see, instead, students who respond to schooling and work in a variety of productive and unproductive ways, and teachers and employers who also simultaneously resist and acquiesce to the demands of the dominant culture.

Teacher as Savior and Seller

I will begin with the most pivotal person in the process, the one on whom all else seemed to turn, Mr. Parker. I spent many hours with this teacher, hearing about his upbringing in Arkansas, his early adulthood in the military, the following years in California as a bank employee and a graduate student, his rise to vice-president status, his move from banking to teaching in a community college vocational program, and his "other job" in real estate. He talked about how he had made it as an African-American male, about his mentors, many of whom were Caucasian women, and about coming to believe he was "different." And he talked about his students, mostly the African-American women, going to great lengths to articulate what he hoped to do for them—how he tried to help them avoid the fate he feared was awaiting most—being single parents and getting by on welfare. He talked about the men he believed were waiting to exploit them and about their having to live in communities scarred by poverty, drugs, and violence. He also talked about the exceptions, the students who had passed through his program and made it, the superstars who were able to advance through the bank into mid-level management or worked happily as full-time tellers during prime-time hours, or used entry-level jobs in banking for a leg up in other corporations, or to put themselves through college.

As I have noted, Mr. Parker was a teacher who engaged his students. He provided a classroom environment that looked away from itself to the jobs that seemed just right around the corner, and students thrived on this real-world immediacy. Drawing on his firsthand experience as a worker and manager in area banks, he embroidered the lectures and labs with tales and homilies from the field, and he caught his students' rapt attention. He also provided instructional "scaffolding," making it possible for students to carry out tasks like "balancing" when they were not quite able, correcting their errors in the most

accepting way. All of the instruction he offered was filtered through speech styles that seemed culturally congruent, at least for his African-American students.

I have also observed that much instructional time was given to what seemed to me rather blatant socialization—directions on how to sit, dress, and talk, advice that the best thing to do is "not take offense" when an employer tells you to wash dishes or clean up dog feces, admonitions that the most important rule, when you work in a big corporation, is to "keep your mouth shut." This kind of talk was often accompanied by stories of making it—Mr. Parker's included. You can move up in the bank, if that is what you want to do, he told students. But first you have to get your foot in the door, get yourself a job as a proof-operator or a teller, hang in there past the probation time, then watch the internal job announcements for the next position you might apply for. You have to go to school, too, he warned, but added that the bank will often pay your way. This kind of talk made almost everyone listen because it promised a route to the kind of work life many aspired to—professional work—not McDonald's. I heard over and over again—not a place where it is hot and disorderly and you work for peanuts—but professional work.

Mr. Parker talked about a lot of different jobs that a person could get in a bank. His students got actual practice in the course of the program with only two, telling and proofing, and among the group I studied, they got jobs only as proof-operators. There was, then, a mismatch between these students' aspirations and the employment they found through the Banking and Finance program. Many of the students I talked to looked forward to what they believed would be "professional" jobs. They had worked at McDonald's, as teacher's aides, and as assembly line workers in factories. While in some cases they had enjoyed aspects of these jobs, many now wanted "professional" work and the accouterments of middle class living. As LaReisha put it, "I want to dress up and look cute, go to a work and sit behind a desk, then drive my car home and put my feet up and have a glass of wine and read a book." Mr. Parker distinguished working for the bank from other jobs; he offered it as entry-level work in the corporate world, with added benefits of internal promotion and the possibility of a career. Yet, among the students I studied, students experienced no chance of advancement.

Once I learned the nature of being a proof-operator and understood how unlikely it was that students would even keep their jobs, much less be promoted, the hard question became how Mr. Parker could keep up the charade. How could he keep sending students

to work in these banks? Why didn't he fight to overhaul his program to make it more responsible, if not more responsive, rather than dig in to maintain its present form? How could he continue to shell out promises to student after student of a better life through entry-level work in a corporation?

The answers to these questions are complex and elusive, and, in a way, I am happy this is the case, for I think they mirror human complexity, variability, and potential. I spent a lot more time interviewing Mr. Parker—session after session after session for over three years—and I have felt alternately grateful and frustrated that it has been difficult if not impossible to construct a seamless, easily packaged interpretation of his motives and aspirations as a teacher and a person. I have felt grateful because I feel that I am at least not in danger of oversimplifying the issues, and I have been frustrated because I have needed to move toward closure. Among the several sets of lyrics I could set to Mr. Parker's music, I will focus here on how his own personal success story and his background as a former bank employee seem to have influenced the way he conceives of his program in Banking and Finance, his role in it, and his relationships with and responsibility towards his students. I focus on these issues here because they seem to have the most relevance for other vocational teachers drawn from the ranks of business and industry.

It is extremely important to remember that Mr. Parker views himself as having made it: having escaped poverty and the limited options available to an African-American man in the 1950s and early 1960s in Arkansas, having come out west and gone to school, and moved up in banking, eventually becoming a vice-president. I have already said he thought of himself as "different," as someone who was able to choose an alternate path from his contemporaries back in Arkansas. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that a great deal of his sense of self-worth and self-identity is bound up in those choices. Nor is it hard to understand his impulse to start his students down a similar path in the expectation or the hope that a few of them will be different, too. Given his background in banking, and his sense of it as his escape route, we might expect Mr. Parker to glamorize the corporate world.

When I first began talking to Mr. Parker, I heard about many success stories among his former students. And it certainly cannot be denied that over the years there were some success stories: a few students were promoted in the bank, some stayed for a while before moving on, and a multitude at least got their foot in the door. All of these were evidence

for Mr. Parker that his program was working. As I continued my interviews with this teacher, the success stories dwindled in number and magnitude, perhaps because I had uncovered the reality of low job retention and perhaps because Mr. Parker became more cognizant in the course of the research of how many of his students actually fell by the way. I sometimes pressed him to consider the low success rate for many students, in particular the African-American women. And when he did, he often combined criticism of the banking system with acceptance of its power and ubiquity. Yes, proofing can be likened to an electronic sweatshop, and, yes, most people get eliminated. But "something's better than nothing." I came to understand that it was not the case that Mr. Parker was totally uncritical of the establishment; it was rather that, as a practical man, he found it more sensible to accept the system and work within it than to set off on the fool's errand of transforming it.

When it came to transforming his own program in Banking and Finance at Gateway College, there were powerful influences on Mr. Parker to maintain the program in its current state. This program was set up to supply entry-level workers to area banks at regular intervals. Thus, students got a bit of all-purpose training—a little hands-on practice with telling, some information on the federal reserve, a little occasional practice on a proof-machine—but not much intensive work on anything, certainly no advanced study, and theory was out of the question. This was the way Mr. Parker had been trained, and this is what the banks preferred. Thus, when administrators at Gateway College suggested a curriculum transformation, the inclusion of more theoretical, transfer-oriented courses, they met with adamant resistance. Mr. Parker and his Advisory Board of local banking people saw no need for such a change. Mr. Parker knew what the banks wanted, and he intended to give it to them. This stance grew, I believe, from a mixture of motives. I have already described Mr. Parker's personal success story: he hoped to pass the torch to other "different" individuals; he had started at the bottom and worked his way up, supplementing his schooling along the way; and others could profit from that route, too. His attitude seemed to grow as well from a desire to please the banks. Mr. Parker's allegiance was certainly with the financial community rather than the community college. He kept apart from the activities of his department, preferring not to engage in interdepartmental politics, and he viewed himself as a practitioner, someone who could make it in the real world of finance, not someone relegated to that mere shadow of life that is reflected in educational institutions.

Thus, Mr. Parker was able, on the one hand, to represent banking as a viable career goal for students, and, on the other, to send them to what he knew would be dead-end jobs for most. He understood, on the basis of his own experience, that a person can move up the ladder if he or she is sufficiently diligent, cooperative, and "different." In addition, his model of success was practice rather than academically oriented. Interestingly, these characteristics and beliefs are probably not too different from those of many vocational teachers drawn from the ranks of business and industry to teach courses in community colleges and high schools.

I think it is important not to lose sight, when assessing Mr. Parker's role in perpetuating the social and economic inequities experienced by his students, of a much bigger picture. To conclude that the whole problem lies with this teacher, to decide that we need simply to get rid of him and abolish his program, to assume that if we did so all would be well, is to look for solutions solely on the microlevel and to ignore linkages to larger social, economic, and political issues and the responsibilities of other players.

Community College as Dream and Dream Deferred

Community colleges have been widely criticized. They've been described as places where lower socioeconomic class students and lower track students are channeled to "cool out" (Clark, 1960). They have been characterized as holding pens where people are kept when there are not enough jobs (Shor, 1980). Their once heralded "transfer" function has been challenged (Brint & Karabel, 1989), and their curriculum, particularly its vocational components, has been castigated as second-rate, the provision of undereducation for the underemployed (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Shor, 1980). My study did not examine the community college per se; I did not seek out administrators, staff, and other teachers for their perspectives on education or the Banking and Finance program in particular, and I did not attempt to understand more globally, or in a top-down way, the history and current mission of Gateway College. Thus, the project was not designed to contribute to (or support or challenge) the revisionist literature cited above. Yet, in the course of my interviews with Mr. Parker and his students, and through my interactions with other faculty members and students over several years of research, I came to understand some of the common experiences that people have at Gateway College. And these understandings shed some light on the interplay of democratizing and reproductive forces at the community college.

The first sign I had that Gateway College was not always responsive to students came when I inquired how students got into the Banking and Finance program. I did not see students making reasoned career choices about banking buttressed by the advice of counselors. Rather, students heard that Mr. Parker could get them a job, and they turned up on his doorstep. Or they were flipping through the college catalogue, saw the courses, and thought some knowledge of banking might shore up their skills in an unstable job market. Once deciding to give banking a try, some students were stymied by a complex registration procedure, and others had to negotiate the college's rules about concurrent enrollment in vocational courses. And once enrolled in Banking and Finance, they found it difficult to dip back into the community college to acquire related requisite skills such as facility in writing and reading. The students and their teacher just did not perceive a mechanism for such coordination. Thus, what usually happened was that a student stayed in Banking and Finance and went on to take a job despite the student's need to acquire more extensive literacy skills, or the student dropped out of Banking and Finance and re-entered some other part of the community college curriculum. Another problem was negotiating financial aid; of the advisors, La Reisha said, "They ain't boo-boo, they ain't nothing. . . . I had to help myself."

The insufficient quality and quantity of advisement and the lack of coordination among programs, as experienced by the students, perhaps contributed to the mismatch we noted before between students' career goals and the occupational paths that were available to them through Banking and Finance. For example, if students had known what kinds of jobs would be available after getting a Banking and Finance certificate, they might have reconsidered that vocational choice. Certainly it was the case that what students perceived as a rigid system of rules governing the course of study a person could enroll in—given the kind of financial aid he or she had—put some constraints on how freely students could move about the college.

I also observed almost no coordination between the basic skills/remedial program at Gateway College and the program in Banking and Finance. This gap is significant, for it would seem that a natural progression in this college for many students would be basic skills followed by (or offered concurrently with) a vocational program. Again, this lack of coordination surely served students poorly when the time came for screening tests at the bank. I should also note that Mr. Parker was scathingly critical of the basic skills program at Gateway. He claimed that by its very nature the program stigmatized students, branding

them as deficient and unworthy. He was also skeptical about the academic aspirations that motivated the program, which he knew was designed more to help students enter the community college degree program than to help them with job skills, and this academic path, you will recall, did not impress Mr. Parker. Therefore, he never sought out or recommended the skills program when his students needed remedial help in reading, writing, or math. We have here a disturbing example, then, of how the structure of a community college can interact with teachers' occupational and academic biases and beliefs to serve students poorly.

During the time period of the study, I did observe one instance in which the administration of the college attempted to intervene actively to reform the program in Banking and Finance. As I have mentioned, this was an attempt to force Mr. Parker to offer theory courses, courses that would fit into a program of study designed more to help students transfer to four-year institutions than to get immediate jobs. One way to understand the difficulty facing students in the Banking and Finance program is to recognize that many of them did need jobs in a hurry. Thus, in some ways, the program did fit the bill, getting students into the workforce quickly. On the other hand, it is easy to see that the few skills students acquired or developed while they were in the program are quite narrow. These skills suit the purposes of local banks for particular jobs, but are not necessarily in the longer-term interests of the students. If students are not able to keep their proof-operator jobs, about all they have left from their experience in the program is a certificate and some self-confidence (which we do not mean to belittle). The interesting question is whether the theory courses the administration proposed would bar the students, who now come to Banking and Finance, from any participation, or whether they would serve the function of broadening their skills and knowledge.

There were a good many reminders that Gateway College was low-budget, that it lacked many of the advantages and accouterments of a university or four-year college. I noticed, for example, the outmoded technology in the Banking and Finance program. I have mentioned the program's ancient, often broken proof-machine that students rarely got to practice on. Yet it was their lack of efficiency on this machine that stymied some students on the job. Mr. Parker seemed to assume that learning to use ten-key machines was a suitable, or more likely, a necessary substitute for practice with the proof-machine. However, my brief observations of workers who were operating these machines suggested that such transfer would not be so automatic. Operating a proof-machine seemed to require

a particular kind of "visual literacy"—a particular way of scanning documents for salient information—a skill that would not necessarily flower in a ten-key class such as that provided at Gateway.

There was another technological backwardness that characterized this community college program. The labs on simulated bank-telling had no training with computer terminals. Some students expected to use computers at work—Jackie once commented that you did not have to know much about reading on the job if you could "push it in on those buttons"—but they got no experience with this technology during the Banking and Finance courses, and this despite widely recognized technological changes in banking such as automated tellers. To be sure, most students were not hired as tellers, but, rather, as proof-operators. Students expected jobs as tellers, however, and, perhaps, such employment would have been likelier if they could have claimed some technological expertise. Mr. Parker recognized the backwardness of his program in terms of technology, and said that he had asked for a terminal many times, but was resigned never to receive one. "This is an educational institution," he would explain with a laugh, assuming that this was all he needed to say. I do not know whether Mr. Parker actively petitioned for up-to-date equipment and was repeatedly denied or whether he preferred to keep his distance from the community college by not asking for favors that he would be called upon eventually to return, if only through surface allegiance to his department. I do know that other parts of the college—the basic skills program, for example—had modern computer equipment, even such high-tech gear as video discs. Most importantly, I suspect that the Banking and Finance program was not helped by Mr. Parker's marginal status at Gateway College, whether that status was chosen or imposed.

Gateway College provided students inexpensive and accessible schooling, but it fell short on many counts. A lack of advisement and students' perceptions of the poor quality of the counseling they did get, little coordination among programs, less than collegial relations among instructors in different programs, the alienation experienced by teachers like Mr. Parker, inadequate equipment and resources—all of these things, to a degree, worked against the success of students in our study. I came to think that, for our students, Gateway College was often a place where dreams were deferred, to borrow from Langston Hughes. But this did not happen, however, because individual instructors and staff were willfully unhelpful, but more as a result of habitual patterns of interaction and ways of

doing business that were a part of the history of this institution and, I would guess, of others like it.

The Bank As Leg Up or Put Down

I have shown how bank personnel represented entry-level jobs as stepping stones to a career in the corporate world. "The sky's the limit," stated Mrs. Lavelle. Contrarily, I have also illustrated how most students in the cohort I studied were unable to keep their jobs, much less get promoted. In fact, most were fired within six months and usually less. Students were fired for being late, for not making their production quota, and for being left-handed. The reality of the workplace for ninety-eight percent of the students I studied was that they lost their jobs quickly and returned to dependence on welfare or "nonprofessional" and blue-collar work.

I heard stories of former students who had made good, who began as a teller or a proof-operator and worked their way up into loans or management. In fact, a recent article in Gateway College's student newspaper praised Mr. Parker's program and reported that three former students in the last ten years had become vice-presidents. I recognize that some students are able to rise from entry-level positions through the ranks of the bank, but these students are few and far between—they are the exceptions. It is not very likely that a person hired as a proof-operator will move to teller and more "people-oriented" white-collar-like work. As one bank manager pointed out, these jobs are not even in the same building, and the people you hire for one are not usually the people you hire for the other. Proofing requires the capability to work quickly with your hands, while telling requires communication skills; tellers are the face of the organization, and proof-operators, the hands behind the scenes. Ironically, many of the African-American women in Mr. Parker's class possess marvelous communication skills; they displayed them again and again in the simulated-telling exercises and also in the interviews conducted by the banks. Yet, all of these women were sent on jobs to the proof-center.

Perhaps the one way in which employment at the bank does act as a step ladder is for people who need part-time work while they are putting themselves through school. One Chinese student is doing just that, working nights at the proof-center and attending a state college by day. Mrs. Bork told me she welcomed such workers, not minding at all if people went to school at the same time they were working for her or even if they were working another job in addition to proof-operator. The chance to get part-time work at odd

hours may be helpful for some workers, but it is a far cry from the career ladder that students are led to believe that jobs as proof-operators might be. Indeed, the eagerness with which the proof-center hires workers who have no intention of staying with the bank long-term, and the disdain with which local managers viewed Gateway College's attempt to add bank management to the current Banking and Finance curriculum, belie the myth of internal promotion for most of Mr. Parker's students.

I think it is significant that the personnel managers we interviewed had all worked their way up in the bank. Mrs. Lavelle started out as a bank teller and Mrs. Bork as a proof-operator. Like Mr. Parker, then, these women represented personal success stories, people for whom the system had worked, people who perceived themselves as having been different, who knew they had worked hard, and who believed that others could follow the same path to success. Mrs. Lavelle tended to represent the bank almost as a benevolent institution, saying it made her feel good to work for a corporation that gave people a chance. Mrs. Bork was more skeptical, recognizing that the bank wanted part-time workers so as to avoid paying benefits, but she also insisted that there were many career opportunities available at Bank of the Pacific for the energetic and ambitious. I think it was partly the truth of their own success stories, then, that allowed personnel managers to represent entry-level jobs as stepping stones to the students in Mr. Parker's program. The experiences of these bank personnel and the teacher thus reinforced each other.

It may also have been the case that moving up through the bank was more likely when Mrs. Bork and Mrs. Lavelle were young trainees than at the current moment, due to changes in work organization and the introduction of new technologies. It is well known that the advent of automatic tellers and the use of other computer technologies have both eliminated some jobs in banking and changed the skills required for many positions. According to Bailey (1990), "increasing computerization is leading to the elimination of a considerable amount of repetitive, routine, manual processing work that in the past supported the production of banking services" (p. 27). At the same time, Bailey reports for banking "a growing need among upper tier workers for high-level, specialized knowledge such as systems analysis, market research, mergers and acquisitions, and management" (p. 29). Additionally, middle-level personnel are taking on a broader set of tasks, especially customer service activities—"providing customers with the various pieces of information necessary to offer the customized mix of services that will best answer their needs" (p. 31). So, banks are looking for more and better educated middle-level workers who have a view

of the big picture of banking, rather than for young workers with few skills for entry-level positions who can then move into higher-level positions as they gain knowledge and experience. If these trends that Bailey reports for banking are representative, the very positions that workers like Jackie and Alma are being trained for are ghettoized. It seems extremely unlikely that these workers could advance internally, given that they do not have the skills that are currently valued in banking and that they are being hired to fill jobs that do not reflect the changes that are occurring in the rest of the industry.

Ironically, while many jobs in banks are apparently broadening in scope and skills required, proofing seems to have narrowed. As recently as fifteen years ago, we learned from Mrs. Bork, employees at branch banks shared a number of responsibilities, including telling and proofing. Each branch would, then, have its own proof machine, and workers shared the responsibility of running credits and debits through it. However, in an effort to improve efficiency, the task of proofing was taken from branches and centralized in large centers. And so it is that Jackie and Alma now commute to the city for jobs as proof-operators, jobs that are cut off literally and symbolically from the rest of the banking world. Currently, the job of proofing continues to be simplified, as the number of "pockets" to which debits and credits are sorted is being reduced. And so, rather than requiring an increasingly complex and varied set of capabilities, the job will require somewhat less complicated ones. One only wonders how long it will be before this task is completely automated or is carried out by women in the so-called "third world." (A person knowledgeable about the banking industry once commented to me that we do not need to worry about proofing jobs, since these jobs are surely destined in the near future to be carried out by people in Mexico or other "developing" countries rather than by workers in the United States. To me this comment illustrates a disturbing myopia: Have we no concern for the women in Mexico, Thailand, and Taiwan? And what of the workers in this country whose jobs, as deskilled as they are, are being taken away?) Mrs. Bork thinks human-directed proofing will be around forever, but she may have a blind spot where the expendability of her own specialty is concerned.

The issue of gender is tied to that of the de-skilling of certain jobs. According to Game and Pringle in their study of female workers in Australian banks (1983) and Strober and Arnold (1987) in their comparable study of United States banks, women began to work at what had traditionally been thought of as male jobs during World War II when they were hired as relief tellers. After mechanization had become widespread, they stayed on to

operate ledger and proof machines, taking over the most menial and low-paying jobs that were not thought suitable for men. More recently, women have achieved formal equality of opportunity, due in part, Game and Pringle say, to a shortage of males in the workforce. Yet very few women reach management positions, perhaps because, as Bailey argues for American banks, the career ladder for entry-level positions is being dismantled. Game and Pringle do not think it is accidental that when women are allowed to move into an area of banking, the job has become mechanized, or it is no longer considered a step toward advancement. "Gender is fundamental to the way work is organized," they say, "and work is central in the social construction of gender" (p. 14).

Banking used to be considered "genteel" career work, a good job for young people out of high school who were willing to learn the ropes in expectations of internal advancement. Bailey has shown how current changes in technology and work organization are altering career paths and the nature of work. Yet, if Game and Pringle are right, career paths and the nature of work have always differed for men and women in banking. I see some evidence of this in our data, at least indirectly: Few men enrolled in Mr. Parker's program to begin with, and fewer still took the humble job of proof-operator. Ironically, the few men who did take these jobs were disproportionately over-represented in the group that kept them. Such gender issues are further complicated by issues of race. The vast majority of workers at the proof-center were women—Asian and Hispanic women—and this despite the fact that the majority of the students in Mr. Parker's program were African-American women. So here, I think, is a case of women being shuttled into the most stressful, tedious, and dead-end jobs that a corporation can find to offer. But what is worse, even for these poor, undesirable jobs, one race seems to have been selected out.

Let's recall again the proof-operation test that prospective workers had to pass and the arbitrary way the results of that test were applied. "A process of elimination," Mr. Parker would say. I heard from Mrs. Lavelle that students who had language problems—that is, who were not native speakers of English—were inappropriate candidates for teller positions, and from Mrs. Bork, that such people were great for proofing where communication did not matter. (The exception to this was when a bank requested, because of its particular clientele, a speaker of Cantonese or Vietnamese to train as a teller.) Thus, Asian and Hispanic women got proofing jobs. African-American women, on the other hand, either were not selected at the interview level, or quickly lost their jobs once hired.

And so we have an example here, not only of the feminization of a low-level job, but of ways in which race in combination with gender narrowed a job pool even further.

I believe that, despite the good intentions of mid-level managers like Mrs. Lavelle and her hopes for career paths in the bank for minority women, the job of proof-operator is simply a low-level, dead-end job that serves a purpose right now for a corporation. Given the banking industry's history of employing women in such positions, and given current changes in what banks appear to want in the employees they intend to hire long-term, the only interpretation open to me is that banks are taking advantage of a readily available, low-cost labor pool culled and briefly polished by a well-intentioned teacher in a "we-aim-to-serve" community college program.

Workers Who Work and Work the System

When I looked to see who was working at the proof-center six months after Mr. Parker's students were hired, it was entirely clear that the Banking and Finance program failed at perhaps its most basic aim, that of getting people into the workforce. The great majority of students lost their jobs within six months. Mr. Parker might rationalize this finding by pointing to attitudinal changes that come from taking part in the program and getting a foot in the door of the banking industry—an increase in self-confidence, for example, a newly found belief that you can do it, you can work at a big corporation and not just a burger stand. I do not wish to discount such benefits, for surely they are positive side-effects, but the fact remains that the door to the proof-center was a revolving one, spinning most students out as quickly as they walked in. Most students enrolled in the Banking and Finance program because they heard it would lead quickly to a job, and so it did, but for most it also led soon thereafter to a pink slip. So, in a programmatic sense, if we look just at the outcomes of this vocational program, we cannot help but be startled by how clearly it failed to accomplish its central purpose.

But let us look now from a different perspective, from that of the participants in the program. For it is certainly the case that students have a part in constructing the outcomes of their training and education. In recent years, as I mentioned earlier, theorists interested in reproduction—in particular Willis (1977)—have noted that some working class students resist in classrooms, refusing in a variety of ways to participate in the education and socialization that they perceive as antithetical, or at best irrelevant, to their own background and interests. Most recently, theorists interested in gender issues have pointed out that

some female students resist in less flamboyant ways than did the "lads" in Willis' study, for example, and that many women are also influenced, in contrast to men, by cultures of femininity, greatly foregrounding the importance of romance and marriage in their futures. As a result, it has been claimed, such women tend to have marginalized worker identities, choosing not to invest in or identify with their work lives (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990).

When we examine the activities and conversations of students in Banking and Finance in relation to the early resistance literature, I am surprised at how few of the details overlap. I certainly did not see much overt classroom resistance of the sort documented by Willis (1977) and McLaren (1980), whereby students challenge the teacher or disengage from instruction. Rather, for the most part, I saw students busily engaged in learning how to tell and proof, listening with interest and attention to Mr. Parker's rap on what it is like to be a player in the corporate world or why consumers need to shop around for the best interest rate on car loans. I think the reason for this is that the material circumstances of these students and those in the earlier studies differ greatly. The men and women in Banking and Finance were not middle school or high school children living at home (however reluctantly) under the protective wing and with the financial support (however limited) of parents. They were those students five and ten and twenty years later, with children of their own to support and enough experience with dead-end jobs and an unstable economy to quell most rebellious spirits. Most Banking and Finance students needed jobs badly, and, for the most part, they were ready to listen to Mr. Parker and to hope he could help them.

I saw some overlap between the women in my study and the findings of Holland and Eisenhart (1990), but differences, too. In some ways there was a "culture of femininity" operating. The women I came to know through the Banking and Finance program did value their relationships with men and intended to pursue them, despite Mr. Parker's protestations. Overwhelmingly, they did want to be mothers—indeed, many of them already were, and this role was unquestionably elevated and important. Nonetheless, an overriding concern for most of these women was getting a job to support themselves and their families. Rather than refusing to invest in work or in their identities as workers, these women made eager attempts to do so. In fact, their investment in work is what brought many of them to the program. One of the major differences in the jobs that were promised through Banking and Finance and the jobs most students had held previously

was that the bank represented (ostensibly) a career path, a leg up in the corporate world. Many of the women were attracted to this notion of career and professional work.

Perhaps a difference between the women in the present study and those in recent accounts of women and resistance is that the Banking and Finance students had already, in an earlier phase of life, invested in romance ideology and a culture of femininity; at this stage in their lives, material conditions were paramount, and they were primed more for socialization than for resistance. This is not to say that all students followed Mr. Parker's game plan. Indeed, some did not, and it is to a discussion of the variety of ways that students used the Banking and Finance program that I now turn.

Most salient among the group I studied were those women who wanted very much to use banking as a leg up in the corporate world, who hoped for a career. Jackie, for example, wanted to obtain an entry-level career position with the possibility of advancement. She wanted a job that would allow her to become self-sufficient, to provide for her baby. "[Just] trying to get my baby some stuff for Christmas," she once commented on her struggles to keep a previous job. She also wanted to gain the respect that we often assume comes with working in a "professional" environment. No more hot burger stands and surly customers for her. Jackie had a boyfriend, the father of her young child, but she held out little hope that he would provide much assistance beyond a few dollars here and there for diapers for the child. She was on her own, and she knew it, and she was very much work-oriented as a result.

Like Jackie, Alma wanted a career with a future and a pleasant, respectful working environment. Her aspirations did not seem to be driven by circumstances as desperate as Jackie's. Although she relied on public assistance, she was not, as was Jackie, on the verge of being evicted, and her children were older and did not require so much close care as did Jackie's toddler. Mr. Parker believed Alma received money from her former husband, the father of her children, but I have no knowledge of that. I do believe that Alma burned to succeed at a banking job and that this desire was born of wanting to make something of herself, to be good at professional work. She had had little success to speak of previously in the work world, and she yearned to demonstrate to herself and to others like Mr. Parker that she was capable. Of all the students I got to know, Alma seemed most willing to do whatever was necessary, whatever she was told, to get and keep a job.

Both Jackie and Alma, we will recall, got their Banking and Finance certificates. Throughout this process, Alma was exceptionally compliant, following Mr. Parker's advice and guidelines to the letter, seeming to hope against hope that this good behavior would be the potion that could conjure up a job. Jackie, too, attended class regularly and seemed to set about in serious fashion the mastery of simulated telling and machine calculation, though on occasion she was apt to voice friendly skepticism about some of Mr. Parker's ideas. There was the time, for example, when she good-naturedly bantered with Mr. Parker, claiming that it was impossible for her to hold her legs for very long in the ladylike position he considered appropriate posture for an interview. But on the whole, both of these women, and many of the others in the group we studied, seemed to put their trust in Mr. Parker, to comply with the requirements of the program, both academic and social, to look forward to a career in the bank, and to believe they were on the right path to getting it.

The irony here, the sad irony, is that those women who bought most wholeheartedly into the party line of the program were most often disappointed in their expectations. Jackie did get a job, but hardly the professional one she was hoping for. Rather, she received part-time hours, no benefits, and incurred additional expenses in terms of transportation, child care, and food. When Jackie was late because of the complexities of traveling a great distance on public transportation and managing child care, she was fired, and this despite the fact that she was a quick and accurate worker and that, by her own admission, she had found that she liked working in the proof-center. Alma got hired by hook or crook, circumventing the bank's institutional requirement of a screening test. Nonetheless, she could do the work of proof-operator, and she complied willingly with the stringent rules of the workplace. However, she did not fit the profile the bank had created for this job, that of being right-handed, and she was fired, too.

I have similar stories of other women, particularly African-American women. Lauren worked for the same bank as a proof-operator for nearly six months before she was fired because she was too slow (i.e., she was processing fewer than 1200-items per hour). Josephine tells a similar story. Doreen, a European American, was fast enough, but was fired because she had been late to work five times. Each of these women, like Jackie and Alma, seemed to invest in the idea of a career at the bank, rather than engaging in classroom resistance or escaping through romance ideology, yet all of them lost their jobs rather quickly.

None of this is to say that the women regretted taking jobs as proof-operators or did not feel positive about their experiences in the program. Jackie looked back wistfully on her stint in the bank, imagining she might have been able to make ends meet on her part-time salary, measuring her work at the proof-machine in a cool, guarded environment quite favorably against the noisy and uncomfortable conditions of fast food emporiums. Alma described her feelings of pride in "mastering the machine." Lauren spoke of her brief time as a proof-operator almost as a tourist back from a trip to a foreign culture; she was full of wonder at this glimpse into the workings of a big corporation as well as consternation at the strictness of shop floor rules. Virtually everyone felt, at the end of the program and their jobs, that Mr. Parker had done more for them, had taken a more personal and pragmatic interest in their needs, than many teachers in the past. These positive evaluations by the participants themselves have to temper somewhat the harsher views of those who look at the program from the outside and see there only failure and exploitation.

The next response to the program that I will describe was a more measured one. Students like Koyendi and Chen both took jobs at the proof-center, and Chen still works there. But these students appeared not to buy into the notion of a career in banking so completely. Koyendi, for example, came to Banking and Finance simply because he needed work, being in rather desperate straits financially. We will recall that Koyendi wanted to be a musician and songwriter, and he dressed and looked the part. Banking was just a stopgap, a way to tide himself and his mother over hard financial times, not a career. Koyendi scoffed at his former coworkers at McDonald's who naively hoped to move up a nonexistent corporate ladder, and this skepticism perhaps informed his view of being a proof-operator, too.

I must confess that I considered Koyendi the least likely of all the students to succeed at proofing, since his goals were quite different, his appearance clashed with Mr. Parker's standards, and he seemed very young and inexperienced. Yet, Koyendi came to classes dutifully, accepted Mr. Parker's offer of corporate-type clothing, passed the proof test, and accepted a job immediately. On one of my visits to the proof-center, I saw Koyendi in a training class, "appropriately" attired and coifed. I heard no reports of any difficulty at work, but much admiration from former coworkers who had noticed his tenacity and success. While working at the proof-center, Koyendi grew back his ponytail and looked for other jobs, and perhaps he found one, since I heard after a little over a year that he had left the bank. Koyendi is an example, then, of a worker who used the proof-

center as a stepping stone of sorts. He fit the profile that Mrs. Bork seemed to value, that of a worker who had something going on the side—perhaps another job, hopes for another career, or the need to make some extra money—and who therefore was willing to accept part-time hours with little chance of advancement.

Chen fit this profile, too, I suspect, although I have less information about him because of our language barriers. Chen apparently wanted a different career path, one leading to an associate's degree from the community college and a transfer to a four-year college. He wanted a degree in business, not a certificate; thus, he, too, viewed the banking program as a brief detour, but a financially helpful and educationally relevant one. We will recall, too, that as far as these temporary jobs went, given his preference, Chen wanted a position at telling rather than proofing, but there was little hope of that due to his communication problems. I saw no resistance from Chen in Mr. Parker's class, only cooperation, and I heard from Mr. Parker that Chen was quite grateful for the job and the extra money he was able to make through incentive pay. As far as I know, Chen is still at the bank, although I have heard rumors that he is taking classes part-time at a local college. This student, too, seems to have had lower short-term expectations than some of the women—he wanted not a career in banking but a chance to save money, gain relevant experience, and work toward an advanced degree—and in these more modest goals he was apparently successful.

A third and related category of student is represented by Vivian, the inquisitive, the older woman who wanted to learn rather than train. Again, this female student had long ago gone through the romance stage; her eyes were now on the different prize of education and soaking up knowledge for its own sake, rather than subordinating school and work to romance or subordinating education to work. She had few intentions, apparently, of actually taking a job in a bank, but considered a knowledge of finance a useful thing to have in terms of home loans and other personal goals. It was a bit ironic, then, that Vivian served as Mr. Parker's teaching assistant, wading through two semesters of Banking and Finance only to refuse to take the final plunge—Bank of the Pacific's testing and interview sessions. Whether her educational goals or her insecurity about being too slow a worker were the reasons, or both, Vivian turned the Banking and Finance program to her own purposes. In this way she resembled Koyendi and Chen.

Finally, LaReisha represents the student who, in Mr. Parker's words, is "working the system." We will recall that at the time of our study, LaReisha was making something of a career out of going to community college, taking vocational courses, and receiving public assistance funds. Early on she described to me the imagined benefits of a job in banking: She said she wanted to have a job that would allow her to own her own car, dress up and look cute, go to work and sit behind a desk, then return home and put her feet up, read a book, and have a glass of wine. "She's just like you and me," Mr. Parker commented on hearing this description. "She wants the things any middle-class person wants." LaReisha was among the best students in Mr. Parker's program, catching on to telling, proofing, and machine calculation in a flash. She is still something of a legend in the program because she passed, not only Bank of the Pacific's proof test, but the much feared and rumored impassable screening test of Western Bank, too.

Yet she refused the offer of both jobs, despite her aspirations to a middle-class life style. LaReisha appears to have realized, or she became willing to articulate, that working as a proof-operator was not exactly a bed of roses, not the beginning of corporate life, professional work, and attendant benefits. She had figured out a way to succeed on her own terms, by what Mr. Parker called "working the system," having rejected the myth of advancement through hard work: "It's who you know," she once told us. Of all the students in the study, then, LaReisha was the most openly resistant to Mr. Parker and the values of the program. Her resistance was not flamboyant or mean-spirited—she remained on fond terms and in contact with Mr. Parker after the program ended—and its source was not romance ideology—LaReisha had a boyfriend, but no interest in supporting him. The irony I mentioned before compounds, however, for she was also one of the most successful. Although she refused the bank jobs, she was able to land, on her own, one job with the local public transportation system as a bus driver, and another supplementary position as a driver at a car rental agency. At this point in her life she seemed to have a healthy opinion of herself and her educational experiences, too, telling me and another former student, "Everything I know is a skill."

To summarize, the students in this study did not fit so neatly into categories developed in reproduction and resistance literature; their responses to the Banking and Finance program were more complex and were influenced rather heavily by the material conditions that at present put powerful constraints on their lives. Cultures of femininity, as well as active classroom resistance, were subordinate to these students' needs for

employment. Although the program clearly failed the students in its most overt function, helping them to both become and remain employed, it was not a failure from the perspective of most of the students, who judged it positively, at least during the timeframe of this research. (As we have continued to interview the participants in the study and follow their work lives beyond their jobs in banks, we have noticed that some students have tended to become more critical of the program as time passes.) Moreover, some students shaped the program to their own interests, rather than bending their needs to fit its outlines.

Looking for Solutions in Critical Skills

Well into the research I began to ask Mr. Parker what he thought might be done to improve his Banking and Finance program. Perhaps surprisingly, and perhaps not so, he mentioned the inclusion of instruction on reading and writing. Mr. Parker had consistently told me that he did not teach reading and writing, that literacy was not his bailiwick. But he had also become increasingly aware, as we examined the screening tests instituted by area banks, that some of his students were being shut out because they had had little practice with the literacies associated with such test-taking events. He also began to think more seriously about the limited possibilities his students currently had of advancing from proofing to other bank jobs if those jobs required literacy or some certification thereof.

I argued earlier that, contrary to much popular literature, a lack of "basic skills" was not a sufficient explanation for the difficulties that students experienced in succeeding at and holding on to their jobs as proof-operators. It follows that literacy instruction will not be a total solution to these difficulties, and I do not suggest it as such. In the conclusion to this report I will offer a set of recommendations, some involving literacy and many focusing on other issues. But due to the centrality of literacy in current debates over work and schooling, and because I recognize that some literacy practices are more empowering than others, and also because, like Mr. Parker, I see students being held back because they are not familiar with certain reading and writing activities, I want to focus now on the role that literacy instruction might play in a vocational program like Banking and Finance.

Within communities of literacy teachers and researchers, it is often acknowledged, if not discussed in exactly these terms, that literacy is multiple, that reading and writing are

not generic psychological skills but, rather, are social practices (Gee, 1989; Heath, 1983; Reder, 1987; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984). A simple example of this is the fact that there are different kinds of literacies and possessing one kind does not mean you possess all the others. A person might be quite adept at reading racing forms, for example, but do poorly on a test of reading comprehension. Studying the Bible in Sunday School carries with it certain understandings of text, author, and interpretation, which are understandings, however, that would serve one poorly in a literary analysis of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Writing a legal brief means being party to a special set of conventions, commonplaces, and modes of argument; being able to compose advertising copy means being literate in a different way. It follows that, just as there are different literacies, there are also different pedagogies and sets of instructional practices that are associated with various school-based literacies, and these notions of literacy and the practices associated with them can be more or less productive (Lankshear with Lawler, 1987). Here is where we must be careful.

To decide, as Mr. Parker may have done, that literacy is a good thing, a necessary addition to a vocational program, is not to decide what version of literacy might be taught. In the popular literature on workplace literacy that I mentioned at the beginning of this report, there is little if any recognition that literacy is multiple, that there are more and less productive ways of representing literacy and introducing literacy practices to the classroom. Instead, it is presumed sufficient to champion literacy, to decry illiteracy, and to leave the rest—what will count as literacy and as valued literacy practice—unspoken and uncontested.

When we do examine the literacies most often associated with basic skills programs, remedial education, and literacy training for adults, we find an astonishingly resistant and, I believe, unhealthy strain, one that continues to ward off attacks from a variety of quarters. Bartholomae (1979) called this strain "basic skills" and developed an alternative to it for remedial college writers (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986; see also Rose, 1983). Grubb, Kalman, Castellano, and Brown (1990) critiqued what they labeled "skills and drills" instruction—which they found to be overwhelmingly characteristic of vocational and job training programs for adults—in light of instructional principles drawn from "good practice" literature in adult education. Giroux (1988) identified a perspective on writing instruction which he called the "technocratic school," and argued that such instruction

needs to be replaced by a pedagogy which links writing, learning, and critical thinking—an approach to literacy that we dubbed "critical skills" earlier in this report.

Although there are differences among the various critiques and differences, too, in the various manifestations of basic skills literacy, I feel on steady ground in making certain generalizations about this kind of literacy and the sorts of instruction associated with it. (I am indebted to Grubb et al. (1990) for the form and substance of this argument. Most of the points I make here in brief are developed and illustrated in their paper.) Basic skills literacy is typically driven by an overly zealous subscription to rules and correctness and a focus on product to the exclusion of process. It tends to represent complex competencies such as reading or writing as componential, as separable into discrete units which can be taught one by one. It values individualized learning, the pace of which is governed by tests and assessments. And it treats reading and writing as neutral, technical skills, equally available and empowering, both educationally and economically. Alternatives to basic skills, on the other hand, foreground the active construction of meaning over the mastery of forms and correctness. They treat reading and writing as activities which must be practiced holistically. They emphasize the considerable extent to which literacy draws its life from the social through interaction and membership in community. And they view literacy as deeply and permanently ideological rather than politically separate or culture free.

In addition to theoretical arguments which support alternatives to basic skills (see Street, 1984), there are practical ones. As Grubb et al. (1990) point out, basic skills literacy has been a staple in K to 12 education, particularly for students in remedial or vocational tracks, but there is little evidence of its effectiveness. Judging from the large number of adults who surface in job training programs, welfare-to-work programs, and remedial courses in the community college and four-year college—all needing "basic" instruction in reading, writing, and math—whatever approach is being used in middle school and high school must not be working very well. I see, then, many good reasons to steer clear of basic skills, traditionally defined, when considering what literacies to promote in Mr. Parker's vocational program in Banking and Finance.

One recent and much-touted alternative to basic skills in a vocational program is the so called "functional context" approach, whereby instructional materials on reading, writing, and math are derived from job-related literacy materials (e.g., see Sticht Armstrong, Hickey, & Caylor, 1987, and Mikulecky & Philippi, 1990, who collaborated

with the American Bankers Association to put together a set of workbooks, commercially available, designed to address basic skills problems in banking following a functional context approach). The reasoning is that, not only will adults be more motivated when their schooling is based on work-related, presumably relevant materials, but they will be better able to learn since the texts will be based on things they already know about, and moreover, what they learn will actually be applicable to work and therefore pleasing to the employer. The functional context approach is surely a potential improvement upon skills and drills approaches, but we should be careful not to reify this approach, to make it our "new orthodoxy" (Schultz, 1992). Only a little probing reveals that there is no inherent magic in job-related materials. Sometimes, as Gowen (1990) has demonstrated, the very fact that literacy materials are job-related is enough to alienate disaffected workers. And as Grubb et al. (1990) have pointed out, job-related literacy materials are just as susceptible as other kinds of "content" to a basic skills approach.

What is needed is an alternative to basic skills instruction which does not neglect job-related literacies, but also goes a considerable distance beyond them to incorporate the characteristics mentioned above. There would be good reason, for example, for Mr. Parker to teach his students about test-taking and the bank's screening tests, for otherwise the literacies required in these situations would undoubtedly act as gatekeepers for some students. There is a need, as well, to introduce students to the kinds of reading required to complete the several weeks of on-the-job training required during the probationary period of being a proof-operator. I suspect that students could also do with more practice with the peculiar kind of document literacy needed to speedily process debits and credits through a proof-machine. But instruction in only these kinds of job-related literacies would shortchange students, denying them, for example, the writing skills that seem to be expected for advancement, or the literacies that would contribute to the accomplishment of personal goals, or those literacy practices collected under the rubric of "critical skills."

The most radical alternative to basic skills, and the one that is usually absent from even the most progressive of adult programs, is the "critical skills" perspective. The notion behind critical literacy and critical pedagogy is that, not only will students learn to decode or inscribe texts, they will learn to assess those texts, to read their "world" as Freire would say, in an attempt to understand the relations of power and domination that underlie and inform and create them, and ultimately to act to change them. (My notions of critical literacy and critical pedagogy are based on my reading of Giroux [1983, 1988, 1991];

Giroux & McLaren [1989]; Freire [1968]; Freire & Macedo [1987]; and Shor [1989].) Mr. Parker's students would not just learn how to take the bank's proof tests, they would inquire as to why it is that banks have suddenly, at the present moment, reinstituted such requirements after a ten-year hiatus. Students would not just learn to operate a proof-machine or to do telling, they would consider how it came to be that most of the people hired as proof-operators and tellers nowadays are women, women of color, and how it is that proofing came to be a centralized activity rather than one shared by numerous employees at local branch banks. Students would not just dream of and work toward advancement and a career within the bank, they would research the likelihood and conditions of such progress. Students would not just accept the designation of part-time employee, they would question why it is that proof-centers will only hire them as hourlies. And they would ask how banks make their money and how they spend it.

All of these activities would take place in a language-rich environment, where students would read and write a variety of types of texts in interaction and collaboration with each other. Mr. Parker will tell you that such activities can take place apart from reading and writing, and he is right to an extent. But the point is that reading and writing would occur in this alternative pedagogy as an integral part of the larger critique, a reading of the world. Reading and writing in this fashion would be a step toward what Flower (in preparation) has called "literate action." Students would, through literacy and language activities, construct meaning about their world. This kind of meaning-making, this kind of literate action, just might provide the basis for either action upon the world or, at the very least, an informed understanding of one's position in it, the reflective position from which vantage one could eventually work for change.

Reading and writing activities as sketched here—as critical literacy or literate action—thus would have an important role to play in helping us escape the conundrum of involuntary inaction or unproductive and ineffective action which seems to follow from theories of reproduction and resistance. Here is a space, it would seem, where individual agency can develop and flourish, where students and teachers alike can operate as what Giroux (1988) has termed "transformative intellectuals."

I support the notion of critical literacy and see it as a necessary grounding for "functional context" reading and writing activities, as well as for other alternatives to basic skills. What perplexes me is how to make this approach viable for students in such

difficult straits as those in the Banking and Finance program. I do not want to underestimate the power of a change in critical consciousness such as could occur as a result of a "critical" banking and finance curriculum. But right beside this change in consciousness, or close on its heels, must come a change in material circumstances. It is most unjust to put the entire burden for social change on the shoulders of those who are already overburdened—to expect, for example, that women empowered by critical literacy will suddenly be able to cope with child care and transportation difficulties or to live on a part-time proof-operator's salary. In my view, this is offering literacy, even critical literacy, as a solution to problems that it cannot solve (cf. Horsman, 1990).

RECOMMENDATIONS: MAKING SOMETHING BETTER THAN NOTHING

Here are some suggestions for reorganization and reform in both the community college vocational program and the workplace. Although the program in Banking and Finance and banks as workplaces are addressed specifically, I believe the recommendations will hit home for other short-term, narrowly focused job training programs and will be relevant to students who are women and/or people of color in such programs.

I turn first to the short-term improvements that could be made in vocational programs like Banking and Finance:

- **Match job placement to students' aspirations.**
  There was often a serious mismatch between students' aspirations and the jobs they got. Many students dreamed of professional careers, and almost all of those who planned to work in banks thought they would be working as tellers rather than proof-operators. The banks involved seemed to expect to hire most students as proof-operators; indeed, interviews and testing for this job were conducted on campus. Jobs as tellers or other positions seemed to be more hit or miss; when there was a vacancy, the instructor might be told, or perhaps not. If a community college vocational program is going to serve local corporations so directly, training students for specific jobs, then it seems reasonable to expand the range of positions that students can reasonably expect to apply for. This would perhaps mean lengthening the program and broadening its scope, issues I address below. I think

every effort should be made, not to shape students' aspirations to fit the bank jobs that are most abundant, but to provide opportunities for students to acquire the experiences and training they need to get the jobs they want.

- **Attend to job retention as well as job placement.**
  It is quite obvious from the relatively high placement rate and the quite low retention rate that students from the vocational program are getting hired but are rarely keeping their jobs beyond two to six months. The instructor usually loses touch with students after they leave the program except through random news brought by their friends or coworkers. Thus, when things go awry at work—when students are having trouble with tardiness or making production—they have no counsel and no intermediary. This is especially the case since, of course, there is no union. There needs to be serious attention to follow-up—regular meetings with new workers at the job site and regular discussions with supervisors. Vocational education for "at-risk" adults cannot end with the end of the semester.

- **Broaden narrow skills training.**
  The Banking and Finance program is an example par excellence of a training program whose curricula fit exactly and narrowly the needs of an employer. Obviously this focus serves the current needs of the employer but certainly not the long-term and perhaps not even the short-term interests of the students. Jobs as proof-operators will likely give way to mechanization and are being deskilled even now. One way to broaden the program in a way that would serve students is, as I just mentioned, to make sure that students are able to train and apply for positions other than proof-operator. I am also supportive of the administration's attempts to introduce theory into the program in hopes of enabling some students to complete an associate's degree and eventually transfer to a four-year college.

- **Update available technologies.**
  The program owned one old proof machine which was cantankerous and unreliable, so students got very little practice with this specialized machine, despite the fact that most students got jobs as proof-operators. (In some follow-up interviews, students mentioned the desirability of more practice on these machines prior to being hired.) There were no computer terminals or any training with computer technology, despite the fact that banks increasingly depend on electronic

media, and that all tellers now operate such equipment. Incorporating experience with these technologies would likely increase students' chances of getting a wider range of banking jobs.

- **Integrate literacy instruction into the vocational program.**
  I have discussed in detail in a previous section the sorts of literacy instruction that might be incorporated into a vocational program. Here I will simply say again that, while the reading and writing required to work as a proof-operator were limited, students were stymied by the reading and problem solving required on screening tests, and if they are planning to advance in banking, competency at reading and writing would be required. I believe that literacy instruction should be based partially on occupation-specific reading and writing activities, but should go well beyond these, and should include extended reading and writing for personal purposes as well as "critical" literacy.

- **Coordinate vocational and academic offerings.**
  The vocational teacher said again and again that he did not teach reading. It was clear that there was virtually no coordination between the banking program and programs on campus which did provide literacy instruction. I do not think the solution is merely to shuttle students who need to brush up on math or to gain experience in writing over to remedial classes. There is a stigma associated with such classes, and there is no guarantee that they will offer instruction in literacy that will serve students well. Instead, there is much evidence to the contrary. I recommend that literacy specialists work with vocational teachers to design reading, writing, and math activities that grow out of vocational concerns and occur as part of the vocational program. There is a great need for "model curricula"—not materials that can be duplicated and used exactly in another program, but materials that can serve as innovative examples of what might be done to integrate literacy instruction with vocational training.

- **Extend short-term program.**
  The recommendations I have made above cannot be implemented in a short-term program where some students stay six weeks, many two months, and only a few for a whole semester. The problem here, of course, is that the big draw of a short-term program is immediate employment. However, the advantages associated with

such a program evaporate when students lose their jobs just as quickly as they get them, as we have demonstrated was the case for students in Banking and Finance. I believe that for most students to learn the things they will need for long-term employment, the program should last at least a semester. However, a more radical reorganization would be to design a course of study that gave students training in a cluster of vocations, with satellite courses on literacy and other "academic" subject matters, in lieu of short-term training in only one occupation. It was clear that many students came to Banking and Finance, not because they had a burning desire to work in a bank, but because they needed to get a job. Exposure to a variety of occupations might serve students better than short-term training, or even intensive training, in one area. To make this kind of reorganization viable, however, we must find some way to deal with the material circumstances of students who desperately need to work and cannot afford to take off extended time for training.

The above recommendations for the most part deal with changes in the curriculum and organization of a vocational program within a community college, but I think there needs to be reform at work as well. A long time ago, John Dewey was concerned that secondary vocational education not merely "'adapt' workers to the existing industrial regime." "I am not sufficiently in love with the regime for that," he wrote. Dewey thought that, rather, we should work for "a kind of vocational education which will first alter the existing industrial system, and ultimately transform it" (quoted in Lazerson & Grubb, 1974, p. 37). Reform at work may be an old topic, but it remains a crucial one and an issue that all educators, not just vocational teachers, need to confront. It is not enough to twist and shape vocational courses or literacy programs to suit the specialized needs of industry and business, or more positively, to search for ways around the constraints and the less than desirable conditions of many forms of work. Given the interest taken these days by businesses and corporations in partnerships and collaborations with schools, there is perhaps a window of opportunity to influence, or at least to air, conceptions of work and workplace organization which take advantage of and support human ability and potential. (One step in this direction is *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* [National Center on Education and the Economy, 1990]. Although I do not agree with all of the recommendations of this report, I do support both its assessment that insufficient skills are not the problem and its call for a reorganization of work.)

- **Invest in long-term employment.**

  The proof-center that I studied was designed for turnover. In fact, one manager saw her job as dependent on a revolving door policy. Thus, no provisions were made to assist the predominantly female and minority workforce in keeping their jobs—rules were not bent, for example, when single mothers were late because of child-care responsibilities—and virtually no guidance was available to help workers advance in the corporation or even to move laterally. It is hard not to view this kind of job, as it is currently defined, as merely exploitative. But it would be possible for the corporation to invest in its workforce over the long-term, as I outline below.

- **Decentralize production tasks and diversify front-line workers' responsibilities.**

  By everyone's admission, operating a proof-machine is stressful and deadening work. In fact, this job is so stressful and intense that proof-centers prefer part-time employees who do not work many hours a day; this way they "get the most out of workers." Ironically, at the same time as banks have moved to centralize these "low-level" jobs, some corporations (and banks, too, in terms of other operations) are considering a move (or being urged to consider it; see National Center on Education and the Economy, 1990) to decentralize work and to give more and more diverse responsibility to front-line workers. Not only are such changes expected to improve efficiency and profitability, but they also work against the ghettoization that occurs when certain routine tasks are lumped together and offered as reasonable employment to desperate people. (I recall a conversation with a bank executive from an eastern city during an airport cab ride. This high-level executive, who had worked in banking all his career, did not even know what proof-operators were.)

- **Provide child-care services.**

  The most pressing work-related problem for many women is child care. It is either nonexistent or the services are exorbitantly expensive. The provision of on-site, low-cost child-care facilities would make it possible for many women to work irregular hours and also would solve many instances of absenteeism and tardiness.

- **Create opportunities for full-time employment.**
  One of the ironies for many students in the Banking and Finance program was that they could not live on the part-time salaries that were available to proof-operators. I frequently heard stories from bank personnel of housewives who wanted part-time work, and that is fine, but the people in the Banking and Finance program need a full-time salary if they are ever to escape welfare dependence. There needs to be a range of jobs, some part-time but most full-time, with attendant benefits. Hiring people who cannot possibly live on the available wage is simply unproductive for all concerned. But rather than look to another part-time labor pool, such as college students, I would urge the more socially responsible policy of decreasing part-time jobs and creating opportunities for full-time employment.

- **Create career paths and make them visible.**
  Many women and minorities are being pushed off whatever career ladder exists in banking simply because opportunities have decreased for advancement through on-the-job training and experience. As far as those people who are hired as proof-operators from the Banking and Finance program are concerned, the notion of advancement is so remote as to be almost laughable. These workers are not normally viewed as having the potential for promotion to higher levels. But one can imagine ways to encourage these workers to make banking a career—for example, by broadening their orientation and training to include a more comprehensive picture of what the world of banking is about, by making explicit what the "next step up" would be and what kinds of qualifications are needed for that move, and by subsidizing needed college courses.

- **Admit educators and researchers to the work sites.**
  Educators in general, not just vocational educators, need to know what the work world is like; they need to experience a variety of kinds of work, if not firsthand, at least through a grand tour. Without this kind of knowledge, we all have our heads in the sand, preparing students in our classrooms for a work world we are only vaguely acquainted with. Something similar applies to educational researchers, who traditionally have kept their hands clean of industries and corporations, focusing their investigations on the classroom and school, no matter that classrooms and schools supposedly prepare children for another world. However, one of the roadblocks for both teachers and researchers who would understand

work is the inaccessibility of workplaces. It is not at all easy, we have found (cf. Kusterer, 1978) to attain entry to a work world, much less to study it in depth. Thus, I urge educators and educational researchers to acquire knowledge of workplaces, and I urge leaders of business and industry to facilitate the acquisition of that knowledge by opening their doors.

To these specific recommendations for reorganization and reform in vocational education and the workplace, I would add the following more general observations about the implications of this study for thinking about schooling, work, and the experiences and chances of our students. The study reveals a harsher world than some of us are accustomed to—a world where education holds out false promises, where work is monotonous and uncertain, where the workplace is autocratic and punitive, where the chances of those who are most in need are "slim and none." I think one common and understandable response to such harshness is to treat it as an anomaly, a rare and extreme departure from the norm for schooling and work. But such a response prevents us from examining the extent to which the harsh realities visible in the lives of Jackie and Alma and their friends are present as well, if not so visibly, in the lives of others elsewhere. The study provides the starkest of demonstrations of social reproduction. This does not mean, however, that the process does not occur in other classrooms, other educational institutions, and other workplaces; rather, it simply may not be quite so obvious. (A conversation with Urvashi Sahni helped me understand the value of studying situations that may seem extreme cases for what those situations force us to see or to consider in other settings [Sahni, 1992].) The study brings to light a job which is rapidly being deskilled and a workplace where workers enjoy precious few rights and benefits. However, instead of dismissing this job as merely an anachronism, as a temporary curiosity in a high-tech, high-skilled world, we need to continue to ask just how prevalent "unskilled" and "deskilled" jobs are. (Indeed, we might find ourselves increasingly pressed to ask how prevalent new jobs of any variety are.) Similarly, instead of looking with a disbelieving eye on the working mother who gets fired for being three minutes late, we need to investigate how often democracy really does stop at the workplace door. We need to find out how often, and to think hard about why, the workers therein turn out to be predominately low-income women and people of color.

Let us end by considering again one of Mr. Parker's favorite sayings, one of his favorite summations of the Banking and Finance program. Mr. Parker often told me, when

I expressed dismay at the jobs students got and the brief amount of time they kept them, that "something is better than nothing." This comment haunted me, for I knew very well what he meant. Many of the students in Mr. Parker's program did appear to lack support, confidence, and prospects—and in that way something really was better than nothing. For a time the students experienced Mr. Parker's support, they grew in self-confidence, and they got work, however briefly, in a big corporation. But I came to believe, in the course of my research, that Mr. Parker's modus operandi—"something is better than nothing"—framed the problem in the wrong way. Instead of assuming that the "something" the students get is their only possible alternative to "nothing," we need to find alternate pathways, different, more helpful, and humane ways of assisting people in vocational education and work, of improving their life chances. Instead of offering patchwork solutions—such as focusing solely on building up the literacy skills of the American workforce—we need to examine the pathways that are and are not provided from education to work as well as the conditions of work. We need to insure that survival is not an issue, indeed, that the "something" we are prepared and able to offer is a great deal more.

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